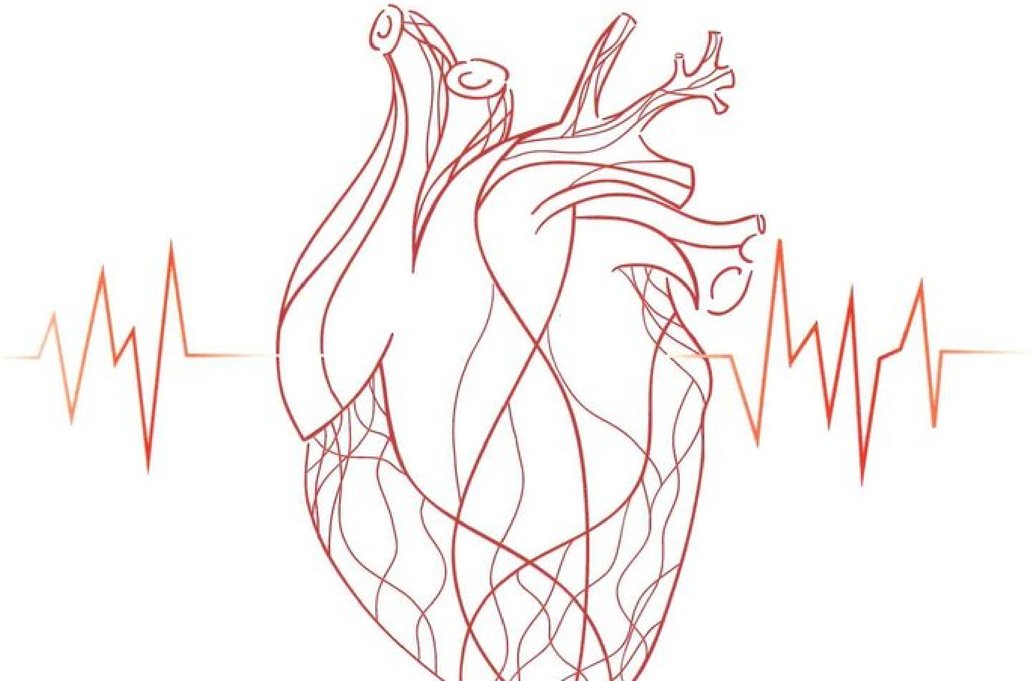
HEART THERAPY

Forty Hadiths in Tazkiyah and Soul Purification



DR. ALI ALBARGHOUTHI

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Forty Hadiths in Tazkiyah and Soul Purification

Dr. Ali Albarghouthi

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Publisher's Note

Islam has given utmost significance to heart purification as it is connected to the success of one's life here and in the hereafter. There are many verses of the Quran and *ahadith* of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ which focus on perfecting the affairs of the soul and heart.

Allah said in the Quran:

قَدۡ أَفۡلَحَ مَن زَكَّىٰهَا ٩ وَقَدۡ خَابَ مَن دَسَّىٰهَا ١٠

He has succeeded who purifies it, and he has failed
who instills it (with corruption).
Ash-Shams (Q91:9–10)

Muhammad ﷺ who was a living example of a purified life had said:

> «Beware! In the body, there is a piece of flesh which, if it is sound, the whole body will be sound, and if it is corrupt, the whole body will be corrupt. It is the heart.»
>
> Bukhari and Muslim.

Despite the availability of a large number of correct instructions from the Quran and Sunnah, not forgetting invaluable literature from scholars of the past with respect to the purification of the soul and heart, evidences have shown that as time went by, a substantial proliferation of baseless methodology and practices have appeared, which sadly include the adoption of exotic rituals from other religions and philosophies. All these were claimed being done in the name of 'heart purification.' Their emergence is typically allowed by misguidance, deviant teachings, and innovations among present day Muslims.

This book in your hands is the first book of its kind which contains strategies to purify your heart and soul and becoming conscious of its corruption, in the light of the true teachings of Islam in accordance with the understanding of the earlier generations of the Ummah.

We ask Allah Almighty to make it useful to its readers, and weighty and heavy in the scale of good deeds for the writer and the publisher. Ameen.

Farid Ullah bin Ahmed Hussain
Chief Executive Officer

Introduction

What is this book?

This is a collection of forty *hadiths* about the heart, the soul, and how to purify them. It is a discussion of the diseases of the heart, their cures, and how to get closer to Allah. It helps to think of this book as a course in spiritual development; an *iman* journey that the book is asking you to take. In the last section of this *Introduction*, I will share with you my recommendation on how to best use this book.

Why this book?

Every book tells a story and is part of a story, and this book is no exception. It is part of the story of Muslims in the 21st century and how they understand and approach spirituality. There is an urgent need to take greater care of our souls because of the state of the world and Muslims today. We cannot hope to overcome our problems without looking at their root causes: the state of our hearts.

Materialism

The world today is in agony under the weight of radical materialism. Our lives and societies are judged based on material markers: money, fame, attention, number of followers on social media, number of clicks, etc. Everything is reduced to the dollar sign and how much of it is gained or lost: this defines success and failure. Our choices, our goals, and our human value are assailed by the idea that there is no reality beyond the physical, that there is no higher meaning beyond what we can see and touch. By stripping human life of any emotional and intellectual depth, modern popular culture, with its incessant focus on the trivial and material, has impoverished human existence. This is why it is common to find people fleeing to alternate lifestyles and spiritualities, looking for anything that can touch their hearts and inject meaning back into their lives.

Muslims are not immune from the effects of materialism and can, like everyone else, be consumed by its juggernaut spread. At the same time, Muslims have a rich reservoir of spirituality that has been preserved in the Quran, the Sunnah, and the traditions of Muslim religious scholars and pious worshipers. The value of what Muslims have is in its divine origin. Since it came from the Creator, the spirituality of Islam is Hereafter-focused, comprehensive, and modeled. It is Hereafter-focused because it does not simply aim to make you happy in this life but intends to save you in this life and the next. Secular spirituality, detached from Allah as it is, has the sole focus of making you feel good here and now, without attention to what happens to you after death. This temporary fix is like a painkiller: it fails to treat the root causes of the problem and the pain resurfaces after the numbness wears off. Feeling good and content about ourselves brings little relief when Allah on the Last Day tells us that He was unhappy with us and the spiritual path we chose: it wasn't the life He wanted us to live. Such spirituality is no more than delusion and escapism. Secularized spirituality (religious spirituality that is reduced to the here and now and that puts no demands on us for real change) is equally flawed and for the same reasons. Islamic spirituality is comprehensive because it originates from the One who knows the ins and outs of the human being: what works, when, and in what proportions. Islamic spirituality provides the balance between mind and heart, individual and society (including family), and reality and ideals. It tackles all the weaknesses of the hearts and provides successful and permanent treatments. The comprehensiveness of Islamic spirituality would remain but a claim if not for the fact that it was lived and modeled. The life of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and his Companions provide us with practical guidance on how this spirituality can enter the real world, be lived day after day, and transform the world as it interacts with it.

Muslims are the bearers of the truth today. An essential part of this truth is the spiritual path and practice that can take humanity back to its Creator and save the world they live in. It is incumbent on Muslims to learn what Islam teaches about the soul, heart, and true value of human life and to share this antidote with a world that is desperately searching for answers.

Solving our problems

We all have problems. We all worry, have regrets, and are under mounting daily pressures. This is the nature of life. But how to cope with all of this? How do we gain the strength to overcome and solve our problems? It must begin with the realization that the key to it all is internal. The condition of our heart and soul could be an impediment to our happiness or even the cause of our unhappiness. The solution to many of our problems lies in the reformation of our hearts so they can be better connected to Allah. We cannot face the troubles of this world alone. And we don't have to. But for this, we need hearts that are willing to listen to Allah and follow His guidance. And this is why we need to fix our hearts in order to fix our problems. When our hearts move closer to Allah, we will gain the strength and wisdom to solve what seems unsolvable, bear what seems unbearable, and Allah will guide and comfort our hearts in the process. Allah will help solve our problems when we are truly close to Him. But when our hearts are a mess, they will fail us.

Rejuvenation of the Ummah

Invigorating the Muslim Ummah today requires a comprehensive understanding of Islam and adherence to its guidance. The most important reformation needed today is that of the heart and soul of Muslims.

The collection of *hadiths* in this book demonstrate that bringing life and strength back to the ranks of the *Ummah* cannot happen without addressing the spiritual weakness that has corrupted our societies. The heart is without doubt the most important organ that is in need of our care and attention. Just consider this *hadith* where the Prophet ﷺ diagnoses the disease of the *Ummah*.

> «يُوشِكُ الأممُ أن تَداعَى عليكم كما تَداعَى الأَكَلةُ إلى قصْعتِها» فقال قائلٌ (ومن قِلَّةٍ نحن يومئذٍ؟) قال «بل أنتم يومئذٍ كثيرٌ ولكنَّكم غُثاءٌ كغُثاءِ السَّيلِ ولينزِعَنَّ اللهُ من صدورِ عدوِّكم المهابةَ منكم وليقذِفَنَّ اللهُ في قلوبِكم الوهْنَ» فقال قائلٌ (يا رسولَ اللهِ وما الوهْنُ؟) قال «حبُّ الدُّنيا وكراهيةُ الموتِ»
>
> رواه أبو داود (٤٢٩٧) وصححه الألباني (السلسلة الصحيحة ٩٥٨).

> «People are about to invite each other over you [to attack you] like people invite each other to a meal.» So someone said: "Will we be few then?" He ﷺ replied: «No, you will be plenty then but you will be like the dregs of the sea. And Allah will remove from the chest of your enemies any fear they have for you and will place weakness in your hearts.» Someone asked: "What is this weakness [meaning where does it come from] O Prophet of Allah?" He ﷺ replied: «Love of the world and hatred of death.»
>
> Reported by Abu Dawud (4297) and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*al-Silsilah al-Sahihah*, 958).

Notice how the Prophet ﷺ traced the weakness of the *Ummah* to love and hate, which reside in the heart. The weakness of the *Ummah* is the product of the weakness in its heart. What is both sad and ironic is that when we go back to the *hadith* commentaries, we read them repeating as far back as the seventh century Hijri the following statement:

نسأل الله العافية فقد ابتلينا بذلك وكأنه نحن المعنيون به

> We ask Allah for safety. We have been afflicted with this as if we are the ones the *hadith* is referring to.

Any effort of reform and reconstruction of the Muslim *Ummah* cannot afford to neglect the essential role the heart plays in the success of any nation. When we ignore the wellbeing of the heart, we doom our projects to ultimate failure.

Unity

The *Ummah* today suffers from dissensions and fragmentations that shook it to the core and left it weak and confused. There are, of course, many reasons for these conflicts, and attempts to unite Muslims must address all of these. One of the main reasons are the obstacles created by our spiritual malaise. Only when the hearts come together, can the bodies too. One of the favors of Allah on the first generation of Muslims was that He had put love between them. Allah the Most High says:

وَٱعْتَصِمُوا۟ بِحَبْلِ ٱللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا۟ ۚ وَٱذْكُرُوا۟ نِعْمَتَ ٱللَّهِ
عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ كُنتُمْ أَعْدَآءً فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُم
بِنِعْمَتِهِۦٓ إِخْوَٰنًا وَكُنتُمْ عَلَىٰ شَفَا حُفْرَةٍ مِّنَ ٱلنَّارِ فَأَنقَذَكُم
مِّنْهَا ۗ كَذَٰلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ ٱللَّهُ لَكُمْ ءَايَٰتِهِۦ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ

> And hold you all firmly to the rope of Allah and do not divide. And remember the favor of Allah upon you when you were enemies and He brought your hearts together and you became, by His favor, brothers. And you were on the edge of a pit of the Fire, and He saved you from it. So does Allah make clear to you His ayat that you may be guided.
>
> Al Imran (Q3:103)

And Allah the Most Merciful says:

وَإِن يُرِيدُوٓا۟ أَن يَخْدَعُوكَ فَإِنَّ حَسْبَكَ ٱللَّهُ ۚ هُوَ ٱلَّذِىٓ أَيَّدَكَ
بِنَصْرِهِۦ وَبِٱلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٦٢﴾ وَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِهِمْ ۚ لَوْ أَنفَقْتَ
مَا فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا مَّآ أَلَّفْتَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِهِمْ وَلَٰكِنَّ ٱللَّهَ
أَلَّفَ بَيْنَهُمْ ۚ إِنَّهُۥ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٦٣﴾

> But if they intend to deceive you, then Allah is sufficient for you. It is He who supported you with His help and with the believers. And He brought together their hearts. If you had spent all that is in the earth, you could not have brought their hearts together; but Allah brought them together. Indeed, He is Exalted in Might and Wise.
>
> Al-Anfal (Q8:62–63)

When the hearts are aligned and free of hatred, jealousy, and arrogance, they can easily accept the truth and admit their mistakes. But when the hearts are diseased and flawed, they will ignore, nay bury the truth, for personal and material gains. A lot of our disagreements today are not born out of ignorance but from the unwillingness to follow the truth even after it has become clear. Yet this is not the only pitfall of having a diseased heart. As will become apparent in this book, the flawed heart has trouble recognizing the truth. This means that it can stare the truth in the face but miss it; the baggage it carries distracts it and obfuscates its view.

Allah the Most high says:

سَأَصْرِفُ عَنْ ءَايَٰتِىَ ٱلَّذِينَ يَتَكَبَّرُونَ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ بِغَيْرِ
ٱلْحَقِّ وَإِن يَرَوْا۟ كُلَّ ءَايَةٍ لَّا يُؤْمِنُوا۟ بِهَا وَإِن يَرَوْا۟ سَبِيلَ
ٱلرُّشْدِ لَا يَتَّخِذُوهُ سَبِيلًا وَإِن يَرَوْا۟ سَبِيلَ ٱلْغَىِّ يَتَّخِذُوهُ
سَبِيلًا ۚ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ كَذَّبُوا۟ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَا وَكَانُوا۟
عَنْهَا غَٰفِلِينَ ﴿١٤٦﴾

> I will turn away from My *ayat* those who are arrogant upon the earth without right, so that if they should see every *ayah*, they will not believe in it. And if they see the path of righteousness, they will not adopt it as a way; and if they see the path of falsehood, they will adopt it as a way. That is because they have denied Our *ayat* and were heedless of them.
>
> Al-Aʿraf (Q7:146)

The flawed hearts perpetuate disagreements, dissension, and infighting. Working on curing our hearts today will bring us closer to the unity and love that the earliest generations enjoyed.

The wrong path to purification?

So maybe you are convinced of the urgent need of modern society for spirituality. But what spiritual path will we take? Who will be our guide? How will we know if we are on the wrong path?

There is a dizzying array of choices and paths. Should one renounce the world or can spirituality be achieved inside the world? Is it a path of hunger, renunciation, and pain that seeks release from the body, or is it a path of minimal sacrifice that suits our consumerist lifestyles? Are certain foods harmful? Are certain poses and meditations essential? How do you know when you have gone too far?

It is easy to slip into the wrong spiritual practice. Unlike medical treatments where the wrong prescription can trigger a physical reaction, spiritual healing is more subtle and mysterious. The effects can take some time to manifest, and even then, one can continue to pursue the same wrong path hoping to erase these negative results. Seeking spirituality is dipping into the world of the *ghayb* (hidden and unseen). Consequently, it must come from pure and reliable sources, and it must come with instructions or a model that illuminates the path.

Guidance from the Quran and Sunnah

Since the Quran and Sunnah are Islam's basic sources, they are also naturally the source of spirituality in Islam. In fact, as it will become apparent soon, one of the main purposes of the religion of Islam is to offer spiritual guidance and purification.

To derive our spirituality from the Quran and Sunnah is to derive it from Allah's pure revelation. Spirituality is also more holistic from its original sources. After the death of the Prophet ﷺ, the Quran and Sunnah were transmitted from one generation to the next. As they were transmitted, various Islamic disciplines developed and furcated, and specializations in these disciplines followed. Increased specialization led sometimes to distance from the original sources and from other Islamic disciplines. As it happened with *aqidah* and *fiqh*, Islamic spirituality acquired guidelines and models that were not always inspired by the original sources of the Quran and Sunnah, in fact contradictory to them, and were sometimes hostile to other Islamic disciplines. Let's take few examples to illustrate.

Some models of Islamic spirituality praised hunger, and there were stories of people who lived on a grain of wheat per day. These models and words of wisdom attributed to past sages also praised abject poverty, abstaining from meat, sleep deprivation, complete solitude, and celibacy. Yet the example of the Prophet ﷺ and his life testifies to the fact that he neither sought these things nor did he ask other Muslims to do so. If the Prophet ﷺ didn't recommend these acts but recommended their opposite (e.g. he recommended marriage), how could they be praised? Islamic spirituality was also plagued with hostility to the work of the *fuqaha* (jurists), book learning, and transmitted knowledge in favor of gnostic knowledge that is both experiential and personal.

These embellishments and deviations burdened Islamic spirituality and crippled its ability to guide and edify. The *tajdid* (renewal) of Islamic disciplines of knowledge that seeks to retrieve the purity of the original sources and rescue them from later contradictory addition can restore Islamic spirituality to its integral place in Muslim life and society.

The Importance of Tazkiyah (Purification and Edification of the Soul) in Islam

The word *tazkiyah* is familiar to Muslims' ears. After all, it comes from the same root as *Zakah*, one of the pillars of Islam. We also find verbs from the root of *tazkiyah* used in the Quran and the Sunnah. In the Arabic language, *tazkiyah* includes the meanings of (1) growth, (2) purity, and (3) blessing (see *Mufradat Alfadh al-Quran*, pp. 380–381, and *Manhaj al-Islam fi Tazkiyat al-Nafs*, pp. 8–13). So, the goal of the process of *tazkiyah* is to purify the soul of its ills, help it to grow, and bless it with *iman*.

Tazkiyah is a Quranic concept. Allah the most high says:

بَلِ ٱللَّهُ يُزَكِّي مَن يَشَآءُ

Indeed Allah purifies (gives *tazkiyah)* whomever He wants.
Al-Nisa (Q4:49)

Allah in this *ayah* declares that it is He who is the source of *tazkiyah*; it is He who can purify our souls, clean our hearts, and bless them all with *iman* and *taqwa*. The important lesson from this *ayah* is that we cannot achieve *tazkiyah* without going back to Allah and asking for

His assistance and guidance. In other words, we have to be completely sincere and reliant on Him, not on anything or anyone else.

Allah the Most High also says in the Quran:

كَمَآ أَرْسَلْنَا فِيكُمْ رَسُولًا مِّنكُمْ يَتْلُوا۟ عَلَيْكُمْ ءَايَٰتِنَا وَيُزَكِّيكُمْ
وَيُعَلِّمُكُمُ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ وَٱلْحِكْمَةَ وَيُعَلِّمُكُم مَّا لَمْ تَكُونُوا۟ تَعْلَمُونَ

Just as [We blessed you when] We sent among you a messenger from yourselves reciting to you Our *ayat* and giving you *tazkiyah* [purifying and blessing you] and teaching you the Book and wisdom and teaching you that which you did not know.
Al-Baqarah (Q2:151)

The Prophet ﷺ is the one who delivered the message to us and is the model of the pious believer. Therefore, he is the one who could teach it and be its best guide. There are important lessons we should note from this *ayah*. Since *tazkiyah* was the mission of the Prophet ﷺ (i.e. part of what he was sent to do), we should seek spiritual purification and growth in his words and actions. True spirituality, one that Allah loves and blesses, can only be found in the message that Allah sent and with the Messenger that Allah sent. The followers of the Prophet ﷺ should also inherit from him this task of actualizing *tazkiyah* and teaching it to others as they inherit the tasks of teaching the Quran and Sunnah. In fact, all three are fused together and are not at all separate.

Allah is the granter of *tazkiyah* and the Prophet ﷺ is its teacher and model. What part do we play in this? Allah says:

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَن زَكَّىٰهَا ۝٩ وَقَدْ خَابَ مَن دَسَّىٰهَا ۝١٠

The one who performs *tazkiyah* of his soul will succeed, and the one who performs *tadsiyah* will fail.
Al-Shams (Q91:9–10).

It is our responsibility and task on this earth to walk the path of *taz-*

kiyah. When we do, we cleanse our souls and allow them to grow with virtue and noble character. Purification and growth are intertwined: there can be no real and sustainable growth without purification from contaminants, just like a garden won't give you beautiful trees and fruits until you cleanse it and protect it from weeds, insects, rodents, and all that would seek to harm it. *Tadsiyah* is the opposite of *tazkiyah*, and it is the act of burying the soul into debasement and harm. We get from the word *tadsiyah* the sense of something stuffed into a tight place, of something hidden and disappearing, and of something low in rank and benefit. When the soul adopts acts, habits, and character that debase it, it loses its potential and the good that is in it, in effect disappearing. It also experiences tightness in forms of anxiety, boredom, and lack of meaning and purpose. And finally, it gets used to swimming in the swamps of crookedness and indecency and does not think of leaving. *Tazkiyah*, on the other hand, suggests the opposite. Out of the embedded meaning of growth and blessing, we get the sense of prominence, spaciousness, nobility, and usefulness. We also get the sense of distance from dishonesty and indecency.

Tazkiyah is also mentioned in the Sunnah. The Prophet ﷺ defined *tazkiyah* in the following important *hadith*:

قال رسول الله ﷺ: «ثلاثٌ مَنْ فَعَلَهُنَّ فقدْ طعِمَ طعْمَ الإيمانِ مَنْ عبَدَ اللهَ وحْدَهُ وأنَّهُ لا إلهَ إلَّا اللهُ وأعْطَى زكاةَ مالِهِ طيِّبَةً بِها نفْسُهُ رافِدَةً عليه كلَّ عامٍ ولا يُعطِي الهَرِمَةَ ولا الدَّرِنَةَ ولا المريضةَ ولا الشَّرَطَ اللَّئِيمَة ولكِنْ من أوسِطِ أمْوالِكمْ فإنَّ اللهَ لمْ يَسألْكمْ خيرَهُ ولا يأمُرْكمْ بِشَرِّهِ وزَكَّى نفْسَهُ» فقال رجلٌ (وما تزكيةُ النفْسِ؟) فقال: «أن يعلمَ أنَّ اللهَ عزَّ وجلَّ معه حيثُ كان»

رواه الطبراني في المعجم الصغير والبيهقي في السنن والبخاري في تاريخه وصحح الألباني اسناده في السلسلة الصحيحة (ج٣ ص٣٨).

> «There are three things that if one does, they will get to taste *iman*: they worship Allah alone believing that there is no one worthy of worship except Allah; and they happily give the *Zakah* of their wealth, willing to give it every year, and not give the old or the sick or the diseased with scabies or the lowly but from the middle of what you own—for Allah did not ask you to give away the best and does not command you to give away the worst; and for one to perform *tazkiyah* of himself.» So a man asked: "And what is *tazkiyah* of oneself?" He said: «To know that Allah is with him wherever he may be.»
>
> Reported by al-Tabarani and al-Bayhaqi and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*al-Silsilah al-Sahihah*, vol. 3, p. 38).

We find in the Prophetic definition of *tazkiyah* both the procedure and the goal. The goal is the definition of *Ihsan*, where one worships Allah as if he sees Him or as if Allah sees him. It also functions as the process of *tazkiyah*. Nurturing and strengthening the feeling that Allah is with us at all times—sees us, hears us, knows what's in our mind and heart—all this moves us to a higher state of *muraqabah* (observance and watchfulness) of our deeds and thoughts, *tawakkul* (reliance) on Allah, and loving Him.

The Story of the Forty Hadiths

The most famous forty *hadith* book is that of al-Nawawi (d. 676 AH). But interestingly, the story of the forty *hadiths* did not begin nor end with al-Nawawi.

The genesis of the idea of collecting forty *hadiths* goes back to the early days of Islam and *hadith* collection. It was common among scholars of Islam at an early age to proclaim certain few *hadiths* as representing the foundations or the essence of Islamic teachings. Al-Shafi'i, Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Ishaq ibn Rahawayh, and Abu Dawud among others are reported to have pinpointed few *hadiths*—three, four, or five—as encapsulating the teachings of Islam (see *Jamiʿ al-Ulum wa al-Hikam*, pp. 61–63). So there was this early realization that some *hadiths* were foundational and comprehensive. Ibn al-Salah (d. 643 AH) built on this and collected twenty-six such *hadiths* that represented the foundations of Islam. Al-Nawawi took these twenty-six and made them forty two. Then finally, Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali (d. 795 AH) made them into fifty *hadith* and wrote his famous commentary on them, *Jamiʿ al-Ulum wa al-Hikam*.

But why forty? As al-Nawawi himself explained, there is a weak *hadith* that states that whoever memorizes forty hadiths will be resurrected among the scholars. This *hadith* seems to have provided the idea for countless number of scholars to attempt to collect forty *hadiths*, even though the aforementioned *hadith*, as al-Nawawi and Ibn Hajar among others declared, is weak. The first person to collect forty *hadiths* was Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak (d. 182 AH), and many scholars followed afterwards. They collected forty of *hadiths* to cover a plethora of topics, general and specific. The most famous of these collections belongs to al-Nawawi, which—as we learned—is a part of a chain of scholarly condensation of the corpus of *hadith*.

This present work is inspired by the effort of these great Muslims, and aims to assist the modern reader in approaching the topic of *tazkiyah* through the guidance and words of the Prophet ﷺ. When it comes to *hadith*, Muslims have to ascertain that the *hadith* they are quoting and basing their religious beliefs and practices on are authentic. This means that Muslims must rely on the work of scholars of *hadith* who study each *hadith* and grade it based on its chain and content. Fortunately, Muslims have a long history of such scholars that include al-Bukhari, Muslim, Ahmad ibn Hanbal, and al-Tirmidhi to name a few. And from the later generations, scholars like Ibn Hajar, Ahmad Shakir, and al-Albani. This work relies on the effort of these and other scholars in selecting only the *hadiths* that they deemed authentic, and avoids the inclusion of weak *hadiths*.

How to approach this book?

Think of this book as a path that you will walk, a process, an interactive project that allows you to change as you read and to absorb what you learn into your life. This, after all, was how the Companions of the Prophet ﷺ learned. As Ibn Mas‘ud رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُ said:

> قال عبدالله بن مسعود: (كان الرجل منا إذا تعلم عشر آيات لم يجاوزهن حتى يعرف معانيهن والعمل بهن)
>
> رواه ابن جرير الطبري في تفسيره وصححه أحمد شاكر في تعليقه على التفسير (ج١ ص٨٠).
>
> When one of us would learn ten *ayahs*, he would not move beyond them until he understood their meanings and applied what was in them.
>
> Reported by al-Tabari in his *Tafsir* and declared authentic by Ahmad Shakir (vol. 1, p. 80).

Also reported by the *tabi‘i* (someone who met the Companions) Abdul Rahman al-Sulami:

> قال عبد الرحمن السلمي: (حدثنا الذين كانوا يُقرِئوننا أنهم كانوا يستقرِئون من النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم فكانوا إذا تعلَّموا عَشْر آيات لم يخلِّفوها حتى يعملوا بما فيها من العمل فتعلَّمنا القرآن والعمل جميعًا)
>
> رواه ابن جرير الطبري في تفسيره وصححه أحمد شاكر في تعليقه على التفسير (ج١ ص٨٠).
>
> The ones who used to teach us the Quran reported to us that they used to request to learn the Quran from the Prophet ﷺ.

> When they used to learn ten *ayahs*, they would not leave them until they apply what is in them. So we learned the Quran and we applied what was in it at the same time.
>
> Reported by al-Tabari in his *Tafsir* and declared authentic by Ahmad Shakir (vol. 1, p. 80).

I recommend you approach this book with the same spirit and method of learning. Study a single *hadith* each week and stop. Allow yourself the time to absorb its message and actualize its teachings. Keep a journal where you record your thoughts, highlighted benefits, inspired sayings, and action plans. Set concrete goals in this journal and monitor your progress. Push yourself to adopt certain good habits and leave addictive, bad ones. This way, you will be able to change as you are reading this book, *insha-Allah*. Make sincere and continuous *du'a* along the way for Allah to help you internalize the truth and to follow it. Think of this book as a long-term project for change. You can use it in a book club, in a mosque/MSA study circle, read it with friends, or teach it to your family and children at home. It is the practice of what you learn that will make the difference.

May Allah make you among the righteous and help you reach the highest levels in Jannah. May Allah make you among those who hear the truth and follow it. May Allah make you among the guided and those who guide others. May Allah fill your heart with peace, love, and contentment. May Allah love you, my dear brother and sister.

HADITH ONE

الحديث الأول

The heart is central

قال رسول الله ﷺ: «إنَّ الحلالَ بيِّنٌ وإنَّ الحرامَ بيِّنٌ وبينهما أُمورٌ مُشْتَبِهاتٌ لا يَعلمُهُنَّ كثيرٌ من النّاسِ فَمنِ اتَّقَى الشُّبُهاتِ استَبْرَأَ لِدِينِهِ وعِرْضِه ومن وقع في الشُّبُهاتِ وقع في الحرامِ كَالرَّاعي يَرْعَى حَوْلَ الحِمَى يُوشِكُ أَن يَرْتَعَ فيه ألا وإنَّ لِكلِّ مَلِكٍ حِمًى ألا وإنَّ حِمَى اللهِ مَحارِمُه ألا وإنَّ في الجَسدِ مُضْغةً إذا صَلَحَتْ صَلَحَ الجَسدُ كلُّه وإذا فَسَدَت فَسَدَ الجسدُ كُلُّهُ ألا وهي القَلبُ»

البخاري (٥٢) ومسلم (١٥٩٩) واللفظ لمسلم.

The Messenger ﷺ said: «*Halal* is clear and *haram* is clear, and between the two are ambiguous matters that many people do not know their rulings. So whoever avoids the ambiguous matters will safeguard his religion and reputation. And the one who falls into them falls in the *haram*, like the shepherd who grazes around the sanctuary and is about to cross into it. Indeed, every king has a sanctuary and the sanctuary of Allah is His prohibitions. And indeed in the body there is a morsel of meat that if it is well, the rest of the body will be well; and if it is corrupt, then the rest of the body will be corrupt. It is the heart.»

Reported by al-Bukhari (52) and Muslim (1599), and the wording is Muslim's.

Commentary

The most important part of the body is the heart, and its condition determines the quality of our lives and *iman*. Following the *halal* and avoiding the doubtful and the *haram* happens only because of the piety of the heart.

The morsel inside the body

Go back to a time where you felt really happy and contented. Maybe you just received some good news or everything around you felt right and you were in a great mood (it would help if you actually pause and try this). Go back to that time and think: How did your body react? Was it also happy? Were your eyes happy, finding beauty in everything you saw? Was your tongue happy, gushing with sweetness and kindness to all those around you? Were you more satisfied with your life? Were you more forgiving and patient with people's mistakes and offenses? Now, please switch and remember a time when you were sad and depressed (I apologize for asking you to do this but it will be helpful if you actually do it). Were your eyes also sad, failing to notice joy around you and spotting imperfections instead? Was your tongue sad, repeating phrases of desperation and lashing out at people/things around you? Were you more likely to punish and condemn those who offend you? Did you feel you were depleted of energy? Did you feel tired or even physically sick?

The effect our emotions have on our bodies is undeniable. In fact, the way we feel can make us physically healthier or sicker. Feeling depressed alters the levels of serotonin in the body and makes us more sensitive to pain. Depression also compromises our immune system, making us less able to fight infection and disease. It also increases our stress hormone levels and increases our chances of heart disease.[1] There is also research to suggest that happiness has a positive physical influence on the body.[2] In a similar fashion and as the *hadith* confirms, the religious state of the heart determines the religious state of the body and how upright it is. So the health of the heart, in more than one way, determines the health and well-being of the body.

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[1] WebMD: How Depression Affects Your Body

[2] Harvard School of Public Health: Happiness and Health

The Prophet ﷺ called the heart a bite-sized piece of meat, contrasting its small size with the great power it has. Abu Hurayrah رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُ said:

> قال أبو هريرة رضي الله عنه: (القلب ملك والأعضاء جنوده فإذا طاب
> الملك طابت جنوده وإذا خبث الملك خبثت جنوده)
> رواه البيهقي في شعب الإيمان (١٠٨).
>
> The heart is the king and the limbs are its soldiers. So if the king is good, his soldiers will be good. And if he is evil, his soldiers will be evil.
>
> Reported by al-Bayhaqi in *Shuʿab al-Iman* (108).

The heart sets the tone for the rest of the body just like the king directs the soldiers under his service. Let's illustrate with another example. Let's think of a security control room with cameras, mics, speakers, and scores of officers and guards. Let's imagine them all protecting a big bank. The one behind the controls chooses the movement of the cameras and what they zoom on, the sensitivity of the mics and what they pick up, the instructions broadcasted from the speakers, the movement of the officers, and where the guards are stationed. The safety of the building depends primarily on who is in the control room. In this example, the control room represents our heart. Like the cameras, what our eyes look at is decided by the controls from our heart. What the ears listen to (like the mics), what our tongues say (like the speakers), and what our body parts do (like the officers and guards) are all directed by the heart. If the heart does its job—it's healthy and alert—the rest of our body will do its job well. But if the heart is sick and distracted, the rest of our body will be sick, and distracted. So the next time your eyes are looking at something, remember the zoom of the camera and ask yourself, why is the person in my control room (i.e. my heart) looking at this? And what does this say about my control room?

How do we change?

Any resolution or project for change must include the reform of the heart, or else it is doomed to fail. The Prophet ﷺ connected our external well-being to our internal one in this *hadith*, and we understand that there can be no external reform without an internal one. In fact, the internal reform is the basis of any external change. The Prophet ﷺ said:

> «التقوى ههنا» يشير إلى صدره.
>
> رواه مسلم (٢٥٦٤).
>
> «*Taqwa* is here,» pointing to his chest.
>
> Reported by Muslim (2564).

This means that *Taqwa* begins and resides in the heart, and it flows from there to the rest of the body. And it is the heart that is the arena where the most significant change takes place. The Prophet ﷺ said:

> «إنَّ الله لا ينظرُ إلى أجسادكم ولا إلى صوركم ولكن ينظر إلى قلوبكم» وأشار بأصابعه إلى صدره.
>
> رواه مسلم (٢٥٦٤).
>
> «Allah does not look at your bodies and images but looks to your hearts,» and he pointed his fingers to his chest.
>
> Reported by Muslim (2564).

As the spot which Allah cares about the most, we have to pay greatest attention to our hearts.

We typically engage in various acts of worship in an effort to become better Muslims. And this is very important in any plan we embrace for spiritual and religious improvement. At the same time, we may neglect to include the treatments of our hearts in this plan. We fail to work on them as we are working on our bodies, and we forget that they need nourishment and attention as well. The result is a disconnect between our hearts and bodies, resulting in our inability to taste the sweetness of the worship we engage in. We then end up with habitual acts and lifeless routines. The Prophet ﷺ said:

> «إنَّ الرَّجلَ لينصرِفُ وما كُتِبَ لَه إلَّا عُشرُ صلاتِهِ تُسعُها ثُمنُها سُبعُها سُدسُها خُمسُها رُبعُها ثُلثُها نِصفُها»
>
> رواه أبو داود (٧٩٦) وحسنه الألباني في صحيح أبي داود (٧٩٦).
>
> «A man would finish [his prayer] and only one tenth of his prayer is written for him, one ninth, one eighth, one seventh, one sixth, one fifth, one quarter, one third, one half.»
>
> Reported by Abu Dawud (796) and al-Albani declared it *hasan* in *Sahih Abi Dawud* (796).

We focus on the hull and perfect it because others are watching us; we focus on the hull because we erroneously believe that performing acts of worship is solely their physical performance. We may even develop an obsession with minutia while ignoring the more fundamental worship of the heart. If we remember this, it becomes easy then to understand the following saying from the Companion Abu al-Darda‘ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ:

> قال أَبو الدَّرْدَاءِ: (اسْتَعِيذُوا بِاللَّهِ مِنْ خُشُوعِ النِّفَاقِ) قِيلَ لَهُ (وَمَا خُشُوعُ النِّفَاقِ؟) قَالَ (أَنْ يُرَى الْجَسَدُ خَاشِعًا وَالْقَلْبُ لَيْسَ بِخَاشِعٍ)
>
> شعب الإيمان للبيهقي (٦٥٦٧).
>
> “Seek Allah’s protection from hypocritical reverence.” He was asked: “What is hypocritical reverence?” He replied: “It is for you to see a reverent body while the heart is not.”

> Reported by al-Bayhaqi in *Shuʿab al-Iman* (6567).

The physical act may have all the marks of the pious performance of worship; but if we look deep inside, we may uncover a wasteland, a heart wrecked with uncertainty and discontentment. If we see and feel this in ourselves, we must turn our immediate attention to fixing our hearts and linking our physical performance of worship to our hearts. As al-Hasan al-Basri once said:

> قَالَ الْحَسَنُ: (دَاوِ قَلْبَك فَإِنَّ حَاجَةَ اللَّهِ إِلَى الْعِبَادِ صَلَاحُ قُلُوبِهِمْ)
>
> جامع العلوم والحكم (ص٢١١).
>
> Treat your heart, for what Allah wants from people is the well-being of their hearts.
>
> *Jamiʿ al-Ulum wa al-Hikam* (p. 211).

If we pay attention, justifiably so, to the excellence of our exterior, we should pay greater attention to the excellence of our interior. It is the excellence and reformation of the heart that will help us when we meet Allah the Most High on the Last Day. Allah says:

يَوۡمَ لَا يَنفَعُ مَالٞ وَلَا بَنُونَ ٨٨ إِلَّا مَنۡ أَتَى ٱللَّهَ بِقَلۡبٖ سَلِيمٖ ٨٩

On the Day when wealth and children will be of no benefit,
except for one who comes to Allah with a sound heart.
Al-Shuʿaraa (Q26:88–89)

The sound heart is one that is free from corruption, full with devotion to the Most Merciful.

The centrality of the heart

In addition to everything said so far, the heart is the most important part of the body because:

1. All the commands of Allah in Islam, including the prohibitions,

are received first by the heart, and it is the heart that accepts or rejects them, decides to pursue them or to avoid them. The body comes in second.

2. At times when the body is unable to perform these commands or is forced out of necessity to do the *haram*, the heart remains steadfast in its acceptance of the *halal* and rejection of the *haram*. Similarly, when someone is compelled to utter words of disbelief for fear of death or torture, it is the *iman* in his heart that keeps him Muslim.
3. The heart has its special worship that does not include the body, while the body's worship always includes the heart. Love, *tawakkul*, sincerity, and contentment are examples of actions of the heart that are not dependent on the body.
4. The intention of the heart, such as wishing to do good or evil, brings great reward or sin though the body is not actively doing anything. And when one does all that he can to perform some good deed but is unable to complete it, his good intention brings him the complete reward of that deed.
5. Since it is the center, the actions of the heart and its worship are the foundations of the acts of the body, and hence are more valuable and more rewardable. The worship of the body is meaningless without the heart. Conversely, the reward for the worship of the body depends on and increases because of the heart: the more *iman* and proper intentions the heart has, the more the reward. Two people, for example, could engage in the same worship but vary greatly in reward because one is more sincere.
6. There is more of a limit to what the body can do, while the heart can engage in worship as long as it is awake. The intent of the heart can also transform casual physical acts into worship.
7. The importance of the heart makes it Shaytan's first and main

> target. This is why Shaytan attacks it constantly with doubts and temptations. The heart is the battleground where *iman* is won or lost.

Our families and children

We, as spouses and parents, are responsible for more than ourselves. We have to advise and take care of our families, most importantly their *iman* and observance of the Islamic obligations. As the *hadith* teaches us, the uprightness of our family members is not only external, but we ought to focus on the well-being of their hearts. We can't demand their physical compliance with Islam while not nurturing their love of Allah and understanding of Islam. The cost of this imbalance is too high, where compliance—out of deference or convenience—turns into resentment and rebellion. We are living in times when the beliefs and teachings of Islam are impugned almost daily, and our families need to be inoculated against the viruses of doubt and self-hate. With rapid and easy access to information worldwide, this is increasingly a problem, even in Muslim countries. In the face of this onslaught, it is no longer sufficient to demand external compliance while ignoring the hearts and minds of our children and families. The development of a strong and personal relationship with Allah, one that is based on a deeper and broader understanding of Islam, is the solution. And the words of the Prophet ﷺ ring true again: The reform of the body lies in the reform of the heart.

Halal and haram and what's in-between

What does it mean for *halal* and *haram* to be clear? It means that knowledge of what is *halal* and *haram* is accessible and comprehensible. It means that this knowledge is widespread and common among Muslims (and even some non-Muslims today). And when it is not, one can find clear statements in the Quran and Sunnah about what is allowed and what is not, or they can consult the religious scholars who will inform them of the ruling and present them with the evidence.

Yet, between the two poles of *halal* and *haram* are matters that are not clear: they may be *halal* or *haram*. But this uncertainty about many such matters is relative: it may be ambiguous for some people but others will know their status. Our task when we do not know is to ask those who know so we can eliminate this uncertainty. Then, the ambiguous will either move to the category of *halal* or *haram*. This takes care of many ambiguous matters that Muslims face in their lives. Yet at times, uncertainty persists because (1) there is strong disagreement between the scholars because of conflicting evidence, (2) there is missing or insufficient information to reach a ruling, or (3) the circumstances are too complicated to render judgment. In the case of persistent doubts and uncertainties, what should a Muslim do?

The Prophet ﷺ explained in the *hadith* that the one who avoids those murky waters protects both his religion and reputation. Partaking of the doubtful is partaking of the *haram* as the Prophet ﷺ stated. How so? Some of these doubtful matters are indeed *haram*, though we have not found out yet; when we accept them, we would be admitting *haram* into our lives. Additionally, developing the habit of indulging in the doubtful emboldens us to violate the prohibitions, as it removes the emotional barrier and distance that stood between us and the prohibited. On the other hand, the one who distances himself from these doubtful matters is more likely to avoid the clear prohibitions. As the Prophet ﷺ said:

> «فمَنْ ترَك ما شُبِّهَ عليه مِنَ الإثمِ كان لما استبانَ أَتْرَكَ ومَنِ اجْتَرَأَ على ما يَشُكُّ فيه مِنَ الإثمِ أَوْشَكَ أنْ يُواقِعَ ما استبانَ»
>
> البخاري (٢٠٥١).

> «The one who leaves what is potentially sinful is more likely to leave the clear sin, and the one who indulges in what is

> potentially sinful is about to violate what's clear.»
>
> Al-Bukhari (2051).

Piety protects one's religion from *haram* and keeps his reputation intact and free from criticism.

The connection between the two parts of the hadith

The body that leaves sin and the potentially sinful is the one that possesses a healthy heart, free from disease. When the heart is inhabited by the love and fear of Allah, the body will necessarily stay away from sinful and ambiguous matters. But if *hawa* (worldly desire) is dominant in the heart, the body will breach the ambiguous barrier and indulge in *haram* without hesitation. The *hadith* also points to the effect the *halal*, *haram*, and ambiguous have on the health of the heart. The actions we choose to do, food we eat and money we earn, leave their mark on our hearts, cleansing or polluting them.

The importance of the hadith

This *hadith* can be found in the collection of forty *hadiths* of al-Nawawi. It is also one of the three or four *hadiths* that have been identified as foundational in Islam. Try your best to remember the assertion of the Prophet ﷺ: your heart is the key to your success in this life and the next.

HADITH TWO

الحديث الثاني

The heart is volatile

قال رسول الله ﷺ: «إِنَّما سُمِيّ القَلْبَ مِن تَقَلُّبِهِ إِنَّما مَثلُ القلبِ مَثلُ ريشَةٍ بالفَلاةِ تَعَلَّقَتْ في أَصْلِ شَجَرَةٍ يُقَلِّبُها الرِّيحُ ظَهْراً لِبَطْنٍ»

رواه أحمد (١٩٦٦١) والطبراني وحسنه العراقي (تخريج أحاديث الإحياء) وصححه الألباني (صحيح الجامع ٢٣٦٥) ورواه ابن ماجة (٧١) بلفظ «مثل القلب مثل الريشة تقلبها الريح بفلاة» وصححه الألباني (صحيح ابن ماجه ٧١).

The Messenger ﷺ said: «The *qalb* [heart] was given this name only because of its fluctuations. The heart is like a feather in the wilderness—at a base of a tree—that continues to be turned on its head by the wind.»

Reported by Ahmad (19661) and al-Tabarani. Al-Iraqi declared it *hasan*, and al-Albani declared it *sahih* (*Sahih al-Jami'*, 2365). Ibn Majah's (71) wording is: «The heart is like a feather which the wind turns upside-down in the wilderness.» Al-Albani declared it *sahih* (*Sahih ibn Majah*, 71).

Commentary

Though the heart is the most important part of our body, it is also the most volatile and unpredictable. Both of these facts explain the great attention we should pay to it and the great care it needs.

Like a feather in the wind

We typically give names to things around us based on the qualities that distinguish them, what stands out about them, and the attribute that we feel most defines them. When it comes to the heart, the name given to it in Arabic signals its key features, if not its most important and dangerous quality. The heart in Arabic is called *qalb*, meaning, as the *hadith* explains, what keeps turning and changing. This quality points to an intense volatility. The heart continuously moves from one emotion to another, from one intent to its opposite in the span of minutes or even seconds, and this *taqallub* (fluctuation) demonstrates how unpredictable and weak our hearts are. The example that the Prophet ﷺ gave of this is a feather carried by the wind in an empty, flat land. The wind blows its hardest in an empty space. As the wind blows, the feather is helplessly tossed in the air, turning from one side to the other, carried from one place to the other. Like the light feather, the heart is also a vulnerable organ that is unstable and is easily susceptible to outside influences. As the feather keeps flying and turning, so does the heart fly between different emotions, thoughts, and intentions.

In another *hadith*, the Prophet paints for us another poignant portrait of the nature of our hearts. He ﷺ said:

«لَقَلْبُ ابن آدم أسرعُ انقلابًا من القِدْرِ إذا اجْتَمَعَتْ غلياناً»

رواه أحمد (٢٣٨١٦) وصححه الألباني في السلسلة الصحيحة (١٧٧٢).

> «The Heart of the child of Adam is more volatile and quicker to change than the completely boiling pot.»
>
> Reported by Ahmad (23816) and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*al-Silsilah al-Sahihah*, 1772).

Anyone who cooks or attempts to cook can appreciate this image. Here, the full pot passes the water's boiling point, completely shaking with the heat beneath it. The heart is similarly in a state of complete agitation. The heart is the most active part of our body. Unlike other body parts, the heart does not stop working (we're talking here about the religiously responsible parts of the body). We can shut our eyes and close our mouths, but we cannot stop thinking about and reacting to the world around us. As the Prophet ﷺ said:

> «أَصْدَقُها حارِثٌ وهمَّامٌ»
>
> رواه وأبو داود (٤٩٥٠) وصححه الألباني في صحيح أبي داود (٤٩٥٠) وصحيح الأدب المفرد (٦٢٩).
>
> «The truest [human names] are Harith [doer] and Hammam [intender].»
>
> Reported by Abu Dawud (4950) and al-Albani declared it *sahih* (*Sahih Abi Dawud*, 4950; *Sahih al-Adab al-Mufrad*, 629).

These two names are the truest human names because each single human being is either the first and/or the second when they are awake. Humans don't stop doing things or intending to do them; their hearts (internals) and their bodies (externals) are always moving. And of the two movements, the intentions of the heart are the most flowing and abundant, as the form of the name (*hammam*) suggests intensity, frequency, and repetition. The heart intends, changes its intent, intends something new, and constantly struggles with its decisions and their consequences. There is also an anxiety that inhabits the heart and does not easily leave it. Allah says in the Quran:

> إِنَّ ٱلۡإِنسَٰنَ خُلِقَ هَلُوعًا ﴿١٩﴾ إِذَا مَسَّهُ ٱلشَّرُّ جَزُوعٗا ﴿٢٠﴾
> وَإِذَا مَسَّهُ ٱلۡخَيۡرُ مَنُوعًا ﴿٢١﴾ إِلَّا ٱلۡمُصَلِّينَ ﴿٢٢﴾
>
> Indeed the human was created with an unrestrained self, full of fear when touched by evil and full of greed when touched by good, except for those who pray.
>
> Al-Ma'arij (Q70:19–22)

The heart easily panics. It lacks patience in the face of trouble and loses hope quickly. And it also panics when good things happen and cannot share what it has. The anxiety of the heart is its lack of trust in anything around it, a constant apprehension of things going wrong. But there is a way out of this as Allah tells us in *ayahs* 22–34.

We also see examples of the unpredictability of the heart in how humans love and hate. The Prophet ﷺ said:

> «أَحْبِبْ حَبِيبَكَ هَوْنًا ما عسى أن يكون بَغِيضَكَ يومًا ما وأَبْغِضْ بَغِيضَكَ
> هَوْنًا ما عسى أن يكونَ حَبِيبَكَ يومًا ما»
>
> رواه الترمذي وصححه الألباني في صحيح الترمذي (١٩٩٧).
>
> «Love your loved one in moderation for perhaps he will be your hated one someday. And hate your hated one in moderation for perhaps he will be your loved one someday.»
>
> Reported by al-Tirmidhi (1997) and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Tirmidhi*, 1997).

We love something/someone so much and believe that this will last forever. Then we change and start hating the very things and people we loved before. Or we hate, then what we hated becomes dear to us. Why do we change so much? So drastically from one side to its opposite?

The heart is indeed restless

How can our heart, the most important part of our body, be the most unstable? This is the paradox that we will try to understand in this book. Why is the heart so volatile like a feather carried by the wind or a like boiling pot? There are several reasons behind this:

1. The heart is the arena where the shaytan is continuously whispering and sending his soldiers of doubts and worldly desires. It is also the arena where the angel of Allah reminds us of virtue and

the Hereafter. As the Prophet ﷺ said:

«إنَّ للشيطانِ لَمَّةً بابنِ آدمَ وللمَلَكِ لَمَّةً فأما لَمَّةُ الشيطانِ فإيعادٌ بالشرِّ وتكذيبٌ بالحقِّ وأما لَمَّةُ المَلَكِ فإيعادٌ بالخيرِ وتصديقٌ بالحقِّ فمَن وجد ذلك فلْيَعْلَمْ أنه من اللهِ فلْيَحْمَدِ اللهَ ومَن وجد الأخرى فلْيَتَعَوَّذْ باللهِ من الشيطانِ» ثم قرأ ﴿الشَّيْطَانُ يَعِدُكُمُ الْفَقْرَ وَيَأْمُرُكُمْ بِالْفَحْشَاءِ وَاللَّهُ يَعِدُكُمْ مَغْفِرَةً مِنْهُ وَفَضْلًا﴾ [البقرة: ٢٦٨].

رواه الترمذي(٢٩٨٨) وصححه الألباني في صحيح الترمذي (٢٩٨٨).

«The Shaytan has a connection to and influence on the child of Adam and the angel has a connection and influence. The connection and influence of Shaytan is the promise of evil and the denial of the truth. And the connection and influence of the angel is the promise of goodness and the acceptance of the truth. So, whoever finds this, let them thank and praise Allah, and whoever finds the other one let them seek Allah's protection from Shaytan.» Then the Prophet ﷺ read [the *ayah* from the Quran]: ﴿Shaytan promises you poverty and commands you to commit indecency, and Allah promises you forgiveness and bounties from Him.﴾ [al-Baqarah: 268].

Reported by al-Tirmidhi (2988) and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Tirmidhi*, 2988).

So, the battle between the soldiers of Shaytan and the soldiers of al-Rahman (the Merciful) rages on in the heart. The heart is flooded with whispers from Shaytan to try to tempt and confuse. These include introducing doubts about what Allah revealed and commanded and inflaming our love and desire for this world in order to abduct us from the path that leads to Allah. Since the heart is the place for these whispers and our resistance to them, it is no wonder that it be so agitated and mercurial.

2. Human movement is motivated by a search for meaning, stability, and permanence. Without *iman* in Allah, the one thing that grants humans stability and meaning, the heart bounces from one thing to the other, looking for this elusive meaning and satisfaction. When it fails to find what it needs, it quickly moves to the next thing. This is why the heart is so temperamental.

   The reason the heart is light and tends foolish is its emptiness and bias. Allah created the human ignorant, with an inclination to transgression. Allah the Most High said:

   إِنَّهُۥ كَانَ ظَلُومًا جَهُولًا ۝٧٢

   He [the human] was unjust and ignorant.
   Al-Ahzab (Q33:72)

   The heart, or the human self (*nafs*), suffers from a good deal of immaturity. The lightness of the feather and the quick shaking of the boiling pot in the *hadith* lets us know that the heart too is light and quick to move. Ibn al-Qayyim wrote in his book *al-Fawa'id* (p. 212) that the human self is ignorant and has tendency to rush into foolishness. The image of the feather and the pot support this assessment—found in other places in Quran and *hadith*. The heart that has *iman* on the other hand tends to be more stable (i.e. heavy) and is not easily moved by harmful suggestions and bad influences.

3. The heart is the gentlest organ since it is the repository of emotions and can be swayed easily.

Safeguarding the heart

If the heart is so essential and yet unstable, its health must be eagerly and carefully protected. The heart, much more than our bodies, is susceptible to sickness and the influences around it. Yet many of us allow everything to flow into it without attention to the damage this can do.

We allow our eyes to look at everything, our ears to listen to everything, and our tongues to say everything. But doesn't this all affect our hearts? We jump from one video to another on YouTube, click on links because we are curious, and read inane and offensive posts because they are in front of us. We fail to filter out content that feeds the instability in our hearts and plants pain and foolish desires in them. When we get bored, a symptom of the longing in our hearts for meaning, we feed this boredom with images and words that further damage our hearts.

Listen to what the Prophet ﷺ said:

> «من سمِع بالدَّجَّالِ فلينْأً عنه فواللهِ إنَّ الرَّجلَ ليأتيه وهو يحسَبُ أنَّه مؤمنٌ فيتبعُه ممَّا يَبْعَثُ به من الشُّبهاتِ أو لما يُبعَثُ به من الشُّبهاتِ»
>
> رواه أبو داود (٤٣١٩) وصححه الألباني في صحيح أبي داود (٤٣١٩).
>
> «If one hears of al-Dajjal then let him stay away from him. I swear by Allah, the one who believes he has faith would come to al-Dajjal and would follow him because of the doubts that he sends or are sent with him.»
>
> Reported by Abu Dawud (4319) and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih Abi Dawud*, 4319).

Here we have someone who is fully sure that he has *iman* and that his *iman* is unshakable. But when he exposes himself to this *fitnah*, he is swept away by it. We hear from some people sometimes that if our faith is truly strong, then it does not matter what it gets exposed to—what we read, hear, or attend—because our faith would endure. The *hadith* about al-Dajjal teaches us not to expose ourselves to temptations as long as we can afford to stay away from them. We do not truly know the strength of our *iman* and what it can and cannot endure. We may not know that there is a soft spot in our heart: doubts or love for something that Allah hates, and our ill-advised encounters may revive all that until it overtakes our heart. Yes, if it is inevitable that we be exposed to tests, then we ask Allah for help and protection as we go through it. But we should not throw ourselves in the fire unnecessarily. We put clean and healthy food into our bodies but not the contaminated, inadequately cooked, or unhealthy. We are more discriminating than eating every piece of food we find lying on the ground. We may believe that we have a healthy immune system, but we do not test it by exposing ourselves to every disease around us; in fact, we take precautions and distance ourselves from it. Our hearts need more care than our bodies.

Some may say or think that this will create a Muslim intellectual ghetto, where Muslims only read to other Muslims, and perhaps only to a specific segment of Muslims. But this is not necessarily the case. We must distinguish between (1) what we need to go into and what we don't, (2) what will bring us harm and what won't, and (3) the level of our Islamic knowledge. The deeper our Islamic knowledge is and the more we consult the wise around us, the better we will be at steering our intellectual ship to safety and avoiding drowning at sea.

The life of the earliest pious Muslims displays the delicate care they treated their hearts with, especially when they feared harm. The way they left reading specific books, sitting with specific people, accepting specific gifts and money, and working in specific professions demonstrates that they put the safety of their hearts above everything else. As al-Dhahabi said:

> (القلوب ضعيفة والشبه خطافة)
>
> سير أعلام النبلاء (ج٧ ص٢٦١).

> The hearts are weak and doubts are aggressive snatchers.
>
> *Siyar A'lam al-Nubala'* (vol 7, p. 261).

Anchoring the heart

The lightness of our hearts demands that we stabilize them, to make them “heavier.” But how can we do this? The rest of the book is an answer to this question. For now, let us consider what Allah said about it the Quran:

إِنَّا سَنُلْقِي عَلَيْكَ قَوْلًا ثَقِيلًا ٥

Indeed, We are going to send down to you a heavy saying.
Al-Muzzammil (Q73:5)

One of the ways in which the Quran is heavy is that it gives stability to human life and heart. Those who desire comfort and clarity for their hearts should seek it from the Quran.

The image of the boiling pot suggests to us that we should oversee our hearts more than we oversee an important meal we are preparing. We should be more finicky and careful about what we allow into our hearts than the ingredients we allow into our bodies or demand in our favorite dishes.

But are our hearts the only ones that need care and attention? Isn’t every heart as fragile and volatile as ours? As we seek to protect our hearts and guard them, let’s also protect the hearts of the people around us. Let us not add to their agitation and confusion; let us not invade their peace with sin and unkindness. If we understand the vulnerability and weakness of the heart, we should take care of other people’s hearts as we do our own.

The last lesson to note in this *hadith* is that Prophet used visual images to approximate what happens in the unseen world (i.e. the state of our heart like a feather or boiling pot). Educators should resort to similar strategies when trying to communicate difficult concepts to their students or the public.

Project

The next time it is windy outside, behold how the wind moves the leaves or anything light at that moment. Spend few minutes observing this and contemplate how much your heart resembles this leaf. Or if you are cooking, note the boiling pot as it shakes, and think of your heart and its instability from one minute to the next. Consider the care you need to give to the most important part of your body.

HADITH THREE

الحديث الثالث

Fitnah of the heart

قال رسول الله ﷺ: «تُعرَضُ الفِتَنُ عَلى القُلوبِ عَرْضَ الحَصِيرِ عُودًا عُودًا فَأَيُّ قلبٍ أُشْرِبَها نُكِتَتْ فِيه نُكْتَةٌ سَوداءُ وأيُّ قلبٍ أنْكَرَها نُكِتَتْ فيه نُكتةٌ بيضاءُ حتى يصِيرَ القلبُ أبيضَ مثلَ الصَّفا لا تَضُرُّه فِتنةٌ ما دامَتِ السمواتُ والأرضُ والآخَرُ أَسْوَدَ مُربَدًّا كالكُوزِ مُجَخِّيًا لا يَعرِفُ مَعروفًا ولا يُنكِرُ مُنكَرًا إلا ما أُشْرِبَ مِن هَواه»

رواه مسلم (١٢٤).

The Messenger ﷺ said: «*Fitnahs* will be presented to the heart, like the weaving of a straw mat, straw after straw. Any heart that absorbs them will have a black dot left in it, and any heart that rejects them will have a white dot left in it. In the end there will be two types of hearts left: one white like a smooth and solid stone with no *fitnah* able to harm it as long as the heavens and earth endure, and another black and turbid like an overturned vessel that does not abide by virtue or reject evil except what agrees with its desire-soaked heart.»

Reported by Muslim (124).

Commentary

The first *hadith* in this book taught us that the heart is the most important part of our body and the engine of human change, while the second *hadith* informed us that it is the most unstable part of our body. These are the primary states and qualities of the heart, qualities created in the heart. But our hearts also develop qualities and reach states based on the type of lives we choose to live. The condition of our hearts is not solely based on their nature but also what we let into our lives. The choices we make have a significant role in shaping our hearts and determining their health. We don't only inherit our hearts, we also create them.

What is a fitnah?

Fitnah (pl. *fitan*) in the Arabic language means test and trial. The *fitnah* of a metal, like gold or silver, is to place it in the fire of a furnace to purify it and melt away its impurities. The *fitnah* humans face is the test and trial they face, either through afflictions (what one hates) or bounties (what one loves). Both of these types of trials reveal the true nature of a human being, each in a different way. *Fitnah* is also used to describe the nature of the tests and their consequences, so *fitnah* could also mean ordeal, temptation, misguidance, sin, disbelief, killings, torture, and so on (consult *Lisan al-Arab* and other Arabic dictionaries for more).

Fitnah could be big or small, personal or public. The following exchange between the Sahabah رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ shows them discussing different types of *fitnahs*. Hudhayfah ibn al-Yaman رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُ said:

> كنا جلوسًا عند عمرَ رضي الله عنه فقال (أيُّكم يحفظ قولَ رسولِ اللهِ صلَّى اللهُ عليهِ وسلَّمَ في الفتنةِ؟) قلتُ (أنا كما قاله) قال (إنك عليه - أو عليها - لجريءٌ) قلتُ (فتنةُ الرجلِ في أهلهِ ومالهِ وولدهِ وجارهِ تكفِّرُها الصلاةُ والصومُ والصدقةُ والأمرُ والنهيُ) قال (ليس هذا أريد ولكنِ الفتنةُ التي تموجُ كما يموجُ البحرُ) قال (ليس عليك منها بأسٌ يا أميرَ المؤمنين إنَّ بينك وبينها بابًا مغلقًا) قال (أيُكسرُ أم يُفتحُ) قال (يُكسر) قال (إذًا لا يُغلق أبدًا) قلنا (أكان عمرُ يعلم البابَ؟) قال (نعم كما أن دون الغدِ

> اللیلةَ إني حدثتُه بحديثٍ ليس بالأغاليطِ) فهبْنا أن نسأل حذيفةَ فأمرنا مسروقًا فسأله فقال (البابُ عمرُ).
>
> رواه البخاري (٥٢٥).
>
> We were sitting with Umar رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُ and he asked: "Who among you remembers what the Prophet ﷺ said about the *fitnah*?" I said: "I, exactly as he said it." He said: "You are bold." I said: "The *fitnah* of the man in his family, wealth, children, and neighbor is expiated by *Salah*, fasting, *sadaqah*, and commanding [good] and forbidding [evil]." He said: "This is not the one I was referring to but the *fitnah* that moves like the waves of the sea." He said: "You will not be harmed by it O Prince of the believers, for there is a closed door between you and it." He said: "Does it get broken or opened?" He said: "Broken." He said: "Then it will never be closed." We asked: "Did Umar know what the door was?" He said: "Yes, as he knew that night follows day. I relayed to him a *hadith* that is clear and without error." We were in awe to ask Hudhayfah, so we asked Masruq to ask him, so he did and he said: "The door is Umar."
>
> Reported by al-Bukhari (525).

The personal *fitnah* is the one we face in our families and wealth. These could act as minor distractions from Allah's path or serious diversions that lead us away from Allah because of the intense love we have for them. As the *hadith* explains, the minor sins caused by this *fitnah* are forgiven through the good acts we do. When this type of *fitnah* leads to major infractions and violations, however, repentance and greater good great will be needed. There is a second type of *fitnah* that Umar رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُ described as the waves of the sea: great, public, continuous without respite, confusing, and causing great agitation and destruction. These are the type of *fitnahs* that engulf a society or spread globally; they leave behind a trail of moral and physical devastation.

Fitnah can also be divided into two types. The first is *fitnah* in belief and knowledge (*ilm*), and this is called the *fitnah* of *shubuhat* or doubts and specious beliefs. The second type of *fitnah* is in our behavior; this is called the *fitnah* of *shahawat*, the temptations of this life and its attractions. Of the two, the *fitnah* in belief is the more serious one. *Shahawat*, like unlawful money and women, steal us away from Allah but we still have the belief that what we are doing is wrong, and this may prompt us to repent later. The *fitnah* of *shubuhat*, such as believing that alcohol and adultery are allowed, deprive the Muslim from the possibility of repentance because they can't recognize the mistakes in their lives anymore.

The Quran and Sunnah speak profusely about *fitnahs* and warn us of them. *Fitnah* has the power to alter our faith and remove it completely. *Fitnah* can be very confusing and hard to resolve or escape from, like falling in quick sand and not seeing a way out: the more you try to escape, the more you sink. And as we approach the Day of Judgment, *fitnah* will only increase in number and grow in magnitude. The Prophet ﷺ said:

«لا تقومُ الساعةُ حتى يُقْبَضَ العِلْمُ وتَكْثُرُ الزلازلُ ويَتقاربُ الزمانُ وتظهرُ الفِتَنُ ويكثُرُ الهَرَجُ وهو القَتْلُ القَتْلُ حتى يكثُرَ فيكم المالُ فيَفيضُ»

رواه البخاري (١٠٣٦).

> «The Hour shall not come to pass until *ilm* becomes scarce; earthquakes increase; time shrinks; *fitan* become prevalent; *harj* increases and it is killings, killings; and until wealth increases and becomes abundant.»
>
> Reported by al-Bukhari (1036).

He ﷺ also said:

> «بادروا بالأعمالِ فتنًا كقطعِ الليلِ المظلمِ يصبحُ الرجلُ مؤمنًا ويمسي كافرًا أو يمسي مؤمنًا ويصبحُ كافرًا يبيعُ دينَه بعرضٍ من الدنيا»
>
> رواه مسلم (١١٨).
>
> «Hasten with your actions before the arrival of *fitan* like pieces of the dark night. One would be a believer in the morning and a disbeliever at night, or a believer at night and a disbeliever in the morning, selling his religion for worldly gains.»
>
> Reported by Muslim (118).

Fitnah could have such a devastating effect that its pull and the confusion it creates can change one so drastically in one single day! The *hadith* also reminds us of the fragility and instability of the heart in the face of *fitnah*.

The straw mat

The Messenger ﷺ presents us in this *hadith* with the image of a straw mat to illustrate how the decisions we make build up into a complete structure, the state of our hearts. Each choice is a straw that joins previous straws in creating the completed mat. This imagery helps us to understand that we are recreating our hearts with our decisions; we are weaving the fabric of our heart from the threads of each single belief/act we accept or reject. The process is gradual and slow. This is why it can go unnoticed and why we have to be very vigilant. We may not realize that we are building a splendid city of *iman* in our hearts or allowing a wasteland of disbelief and rebellion. But each step we take in life is one step closer to either of these two eventualities.

The black and the white dots

The acceptance of *fitnah* (misguided beliefs and actions) leaves a black mark on our hearts. Let's ask ourselves this question: are our hearts dearer to us or the clothes we own? When we buy expensive clothes, we don't allow them to stain so easily. A stain is hard to remove, and it steals the beauty of the fabric. It is easier to preserve the fabric in its pristine condition than to try to restore it. And even when the stain is removed, it often leaves a trace behind. Similarly, avoiding sin and its corrupting effects on mind, body, and soul is easier than trying to escape its addictive clutches and repairing the damage it creates, damage that reaches beyond the individual and into the family and community. The more highly we value our hearts and ourselves, the less likely that we will allow *fitnah* into our lives.

But maybe we think that this black dot cannot do much damage after all. Maybe we can live with one or few black dots in our lives, right? The problem with this line of thinking is that it ignores the nature of the heart and the nature of the *fitnah* that do not cease to come our way. First, it is easier to allow a second stain if there is a first, and even easier to allow a third if there are two. Stains devalue the fabric, and we become desensitized to sin as more of it comes into our lives. Each sin attracts another, and the two open the door for many more to come. Some religious scholars share the following wise saying:

المعصية تقول (أختي أختي) والحسنة تقول (أختي أختي)

> The sin says: "And my sister, my sister!" And a virtuous act says: "And my sister, my sister!"

Fitnah is like a ring in a chain or a piece of rope tied on its other end to another rope. When we hold on to a single sin or *fitnah* and pull it closer to us, we are bringing the next *fitnah* in line closer as well.

Second, sin weakens the resolve of the heart and attacks its health, much like an infection or disease saps the energy and health of the body. Each stain means that the heart is less healthy, less strong, and less alive. How can a heart have the strength to fight and win the next battle when it has chosen to lose in the first, when it is already weak and burdened with sin?

And there is a third problem. The accumulation of sin deprives the heart of the ability to recognize right from wrong and the desire to follow guidance from Allah.

When the heart rejects the *fitnah*, however, a white dot is deposited inside. This happens because this rejection is an act of *iman*, motivated by reverence of Allah and the desire for Him, and not Shaytan, to be the ruler of our heart. One rejects the *fitnah* because their love for Allah is stronger than any pressure or temptation. When we make this choice, our hearts find comfort and peace in *iman*, and our knowledge of the truth and commitment to it solidifies.

Our refusal of the *fitnah* could be motivated by either general or specific evidence against it. For instance, when we receive whispers from Shaytan, we may immediately know their source, seek Allah's refuge from Shaytan, and promptly stop thinking about Shaytan's inspiration. We understand in this case that these whispers are against Islam and what Allah loves, so we avoid them, even though we may not have a specific and clear answer to them. And as long as this type of response is doing its job of protecting our *iman* and heart, it is sufficient. At other times, however, we need to repel the confusion of Shaytan by learning the specific evidence/argument to refute his whispers (e.g. learning the proofs of Allah's existence to counter Shaytan's whisper about His existence). This is why enhancing our Islamic knowledge is one of the strongest safeguards against the corruption of the heart.

The white heart

As the heart accumulates white dots, it becomes in the end white itself. This heart is described in the *hadith* as a white, solid, and smooth rock. The color indicates its purity. Its solidity is its strength of *iman* and commitment to Allah: like this solid rock whose shape does not change, its *iman* does not change too. And because it is smooth, no evil or *fitnah* sticks to it. This is a heart that will not be harmed by *fitnah* as long as it is alive. This is its reward for its patience and faith. It kept fighting off every single *fitnah* presented to it until it prevailed with the help of Allah. It cleansed itself of impurities and cured itself of disease, leaving no space for *fitnah* or Shaytan in it. Sahl ibn Abdullah al-Tusturi said:

> قال سهل بن عبد الله التستري: (من خشع قلبه لم يقرب منه الشيطان)
> مدارج السالكين (ج١ ص٥١٧).
>
> Shaytan does not come close to the one whose heart is reverent [of Allah].
>
> *Madarij al-Salikin* (vol. 1, p. 517).

And al-Ghazali wrote:

> القلب الخالي عن الهوى لا يدخله الشيطان ولذلك قال الله تعالى إن عبادي ليس لك عليهم سلطان [الحجر: ٤٢] فكل من اتبع الهوى فهو عبد الهوى لا عبد الله ولذلك سلط الله عليه الشيطان وقال تعالى أفرأيت من اتخذ إلهه هواه [الفرقان: ٤٣] وهو إشارة إلى أن من الهوى إلهه ومعبوده فهو عبد الهوى لا عبد الله.
> إحياء علوم الدين (ج٣ ص٢٨).
>
> Shaytan cannot enter the heart that is free from *hawa* [desire], and this is why Allah said: "You have no power over my slaves"

> [al-Hijr: 42]. So whoever follows *hawa* is the slave of *hawa*, not the slave of Allah, and that is why Allah allowed Shaytan to have power over him. And Allah said: “Have you seen the one who has taken his *hawa* as his *ilah*?” This is an indication that *hawa* is his *ilah* and object of worship, so he is the slave of *hawa*, not the slave of Allah.
>
> *Ihya Ulum al-Din* (vol 3, p. 28).

The *fitnah* that this heart encounters does not harm it but increases it in strength. When this type of heart receives a *fitnah*, it categorically rejects it out of reverence and love of Allah, and so its love for Allah and *iman* increase and its commitment to the truth grows.

This type of heart remains our hope and destination, never a state we should ever believe that we have attained. When we are saved from a *fitnah*, we should attribute this to Allah’s Mercy and not to a conceited sense of righteousness. Convincing us that we have this invincible heart is one of the oldest plots of Shaytan who tries to undermine our *iman* in whatever way he can. When we look at the example of the elders of the Sahabah, like Abu Bakr and Umar رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا, we find that they were always worried about the state of their *iman*, beseeching Allah for his protection and mercy. They never felt secure that they were beyond the reach of temptation and *fitnah*. If the best of this Ummah and those who were guaranteed Paradise felt this way, how could our inflated egos convince us that we are safe? This is one of the most common pitfalls of those who tread the path of soul purification: feeling that we have ascended to a state of *iman* that lies beyond the reach of Shaytan, that we are somehow better than everyone else around us. If we feel this way, we should understand that we are still prisoners of Shaytan and his manipulations.

It is easy to understand why so many of us fall into that trap. For one, we get swept by our own passion. When we notice that we have left many of our past bad habits behind and are committed to worshiping Allah, we feel a sense of accomplishment. We may be feeling the high of *iman*, which is a great thing. But without the wisdom that comes from deep knowledge of Islam, experience, or the wisdom of elders, we can suffer from *imanic* adolescence. This is when we believe that what we have achieved is monumental, unaware of the fact that we are still at the beginning of a long path to Allah. The other reason we fall into this trap is the whispers of Shaytan. Like an experienced hunter, Shaytan knows our personal weaknesses and personality type. If he fails to distract us from the path of Allah through worldly attractions, he will try to use religion to inflate our ego and corrupt our intention. This is why knowledge is indispensable for anyone who is on a journey to reach the pleasure of Allah.

The black heart

When a heart continuously collects darkness, darkness eventually overtakes it. And this black heart becomes turbid, like an overturned vessel. The black color in the *hadith* signifies absence of light: it has lost the last trace of virtue and *iman* and handed its controls to Shaytan. Its turbidity is its confusion and contamination, just as water loses its purity and turns opaque when mixed with dirt. The *hadith* gives the image of an overturned vessel for such a heart. As an upside-down vessel, this heart pours all of its *iman* out and loses the capacity to carry it. This heart rebels against its nature and turns against it as the vessel in the *hadith* turns on its head. The vessel that was made to hold water is incapable of fulfilling its function when it's in the inverted position. Similarly, the black and polluted heart does not retain guidance from Allah, does not recognize it, and doesn't seek it. The disease in that heart prevents it from appreciating anything but its own desires and wants, even if they anger Allah. Like this vessel, this heart is closed to what Allah wants but is open to sins and corruption.

The acceptance of *fitnah* leads to two dangerous outcomes. The first is losing the ability to distinguish truth from falsehood, mistaking one for the other. Here, indecency becomes virtue and virtue masquerades as indecency. The second disastrous outcome is the adoption of the heart's whims and desire as the standard and compass: it will readily reject the Quran and Sunnah when they contradict what it loves, and only accept them when they agree with its fancy. This heart may announce that it is objective and is only bound by the truth but its constant deviation exposes its lies. The only thing that moves it is its desires; this is its true compass. This why humanity today has such hard time recognizing and seeking the truth.

As with the healthy and white heart, we should never assume that our heart is dead. We should never give up on our heart (or another's heart) and believe that there is no more good left in it. We should never assume that no advice or reminder can penetrate it and change it. Believing all this is another popular plot from Shaytan to further damage our relationship with Allah, to send us faster to Hell. Only Allah knows the hearts that have been completely blackened and ravaged by disobedience. We have no access to this type of knowledge. As long as there is a single breath left in us, we should never despair of Allah's mercy and His power to save. Allah says:

قُلْ يَٰعِبَادِىَ ٱلَّذِينَ أَسْرَفُوا۟ عَلَىٰٓ أَنفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوا۟
مِن رَّحْمَةِ ٱللَّهِ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَغْفِرُ ٱلذُّنُوبَ جَمِيعًا ۚ إِنَّهُۥ هُوَ
ٱلْغَفُورُ ٱلرَّحِيمُ ﴿٥٣﴾

Say: "O My servants who have wronged themselves, do not
despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah forgives all sins.
Indeed, it is He who is the Forgiving, the Merciful."
Al-Zumar (Q39:53)

This *ayah* shines on our hearts the eternal light of hope. No matter what we did in the past or how big our problems now, Allah is always there, willing and happy to receive us and wipe away our sorrow and pain.

The sick heart

The heart can get sick just like the body does. And when the heart has both black and white spots in it, it struggles. There is tension in it between light and darkness, between Shaytan that is trying to capture the throne of the heart and the angels of Allah who are trying to stop him. The collection of back spots is the sickness of the heart, and the white dots are its healthy side. The condition of this heart is aptly captured in the following saying of Hudhayfah رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُ:

> قال حذيفة رضي الله عنه: (القلوبُ أربعةٌ قلبٌ مُصفَّحٌ فذلك قلبُ المنافقِ وقلبٌ أغلفُ فذاك قلبُ الكافرِ وقلبٌ أجردُ كأنَّ فيه سراجٌ يُزْهِرُ فذاك قلبُ المؤمنِ وقلبٌ فيه نفاقٌ وإيمانٌ فمثلُه مثلُ قُرحةٍ يَمُدُّها قَيحٌ ودمٌ ومثلُه مثلُ شجرةٍ يَسْقيها ماءٌ خبيثٌ وطيِّبٌ فأيُّما غَلَبَ عليها غلَبَ)
>
> رواه ابن أبي شيبة في كتاب الإيمان (٥٤) وصححه ابن القيم وأحمد شاكر في عمدة التفسير والألباني.
>
> Hearts are of four types: a two-faced heart, and this is the heart of the hypocrite; a wrapped heart, and this is the heart of the disbeliever; a cleansed heart, as if there is a radiant lamp inside, and this is the heart of the faithful; and a heart that has both hypocrisy and faith, like an ulcer that is supplied with blood and puss, and like a tree that is watered with polluted water and fresh water. Whichever one of the two is greater, wins [the heart].
>
> Reported by Ibn Abi Shaybah in *Kitab al-Iman* (54) and declared *sahih* by Ibn al-Qayyim, Ahmad Shakir, and al-Albani.

The heart of the disbeliever is encased and no light penetrates it. This heart repeatedly rejected the truth and denied its clear proofs, and so it had earned itself a seal. This seal is the sign that this heart is rebellious and will deny all future guidance from Allah. The heart of the hypocrite is no better except that it confesses the truth around the faithful for its personal gains but disbelieves in it internally. The heart of the faithful, on the other hand, is free from any attachment (*ajrad*) except to Allah, completely devoted. This heart has a light that shines through it, illuminating its path, its decisions, and filling it with peace. The last heart is where the battle is raging between good and evil. Hudhayfah رَضِيَ ٱللَّٰهُ عَنْهُ gives the images of an ulcer and a tree, both receiving mixed supplies. Our hearts similarly are under opposite influences when we allow guidance from Allah to be joined with sin and the whispers of Shaytan. Here the Quran, Sunnah, and righteous practice supply the heart with *iman* while various sins, *fitnah*, and doubts supply it with hypocrisy, envy, pride, anger, lust and so on. The heart here is wavering between *iman* and disbelief, moving between health and disease. The abundance of one of the two supplies will eventually determine what type of heart we will have: either it will be the heart of the believer or the heart of the disbeliever/hypocrite. This is why we have to take each black dot so seriously.

قَال أَبو حفص: (المعاصي بَريدُ الكفر كما أَن الحُمَّي بَريدُ المَوت)

الرسالة القشيرية (ج١ ص٦٩).

> Abu Hafs said: "Sins are the messengers of disbelief as fever is the messenger of death."
>
> *Al-Risalah al-Qushayriyyah* (vol. 1, p. 69).

Notice in this saying how sins are treated as part of a chain that ends in disbelief. And notice too the interesting similarity between the sickness and death of the heart and that of the body.

Hawa

Linguistically, *hawa* is the inclination humans have, what they love and are attracted to. This could be something good or evil, beneficial or harmful. Yet in the Quran, *hawa* is consistently treated as a negative, as the love that takes us away from Allah. Allah in the Quran repeatedly warns us not to succumb to the pressure and suggestions of our *hawa*.

يَـٰدَاوُۥدُ إِنَّا جَعَلْنَـٰكَ خَلِيفَةً فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ فَٱحْكُم بَيْنَ ٱلنَّاسِ بِٱلْحَقِّ
وَلَا تَتَّبِعِ ٱلْهَوَىٰ فَيُضِلَّكَ عَن سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ ۚ إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يَضِلُّونَ
عَن سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌۢ بِمَا نَسُوا۟ يَوْمَ ٱلْحِسَابِ ٢٦

> O David, indeed We have made you a successor on earth, so judge between people with justice and do not follow [your own] *hawa*, for it will lead you away from the way of Allah. Indeed, those who go astray from the way of Allah will have severe punishment for having forgotten the Day of Account.
>
> Sad (Q38:26)

Also,

فَإِن لَّمْ يَسْتَجِيبُوا۟ لَكَ فَٱعْلَمْ أَنَّمَا يَتَّبِعُونَ أَهْوَآءَهُمْ ۚ
وَمَنْ أَضَلُّ مِمَّنِ ٱتَّبَعَ هَوَىٰهُ بِغَيْرِ هُدًى مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ ۚ
إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِى ٱلْقَوْمَ ٱلظَّـٰلِمِينَ ٥٠

> But if they do not respond to you, then know that they only follow their [own] *hawa*. And who is more misguided than one who follows his *hawa* without guidance from Allah? Indeed, Allah does not guide the wrongdoers.
>
> Al-Qasas (Q28:50)

Hawa is presented in the Quran as the antithesis of revelation. The problem with human desire is when people decide to follow their own likes and opinions in spite of Allah's revealed religion or without consulting it. Without Allah, human desire will have no direction or discipline, so humans will adopt erroneous beliefs and pursue sinful acts without restraint. The impulse of our desires is strong and they have the ability to cloud the purity of our *fitrah* and abduct our hearts. We need Allah to remind us about the purity of our fitrah, to protect us from the whispers of Shaytan, and to be the final and trusted arbiter when we disagree or are confused. Our desires cannot guide us on their own.

Hawa works on two levels: the level of *shubuhat* (beliefs and doubts) and the level of *shahawat* (worldly attractions and desires). When we put our personal opinion and bias, our passions and emotional attachments, ahead of what Allah and His Prophet ﷺ teach us, we would be following our *hawa* instead of Allah. Shaytan attacks us on both of these levels. He will try to tempt us with the allure of this world and *haram* practices (e.g. wealth, status, fame) and will also attempt to corrupt our belief system (e.g. *shirk* and *bid'ah*).

Ibn Mas'ud رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُ said about *hawa*:

> قال ابنِ مسعودٍ رضي الله عنه: (إنَّكم في زمانٍ كثيرٌ فُقَهاؤُهُ قليلٌ خُطباؤُهُ قليلٌ سُؤَّالُهُ كثيرٌ مُعطوهُ العملُ فيهِ قائدٌ للْهوى وسيأتي مِن بَعدِكم زمانٌ قليلٌ فقَهاؤُهُ كثيرٌ خُطباؤُهُ كثيرٌ سُؤَّالُهُ قليلٌ مُعطوهُ الْهوى فيهِ قائدٌ للعملِ اعلَموا أنَّ حُسنَ الْهَدْيِ في آخرِ الزَّمان خيرٌ من بعض العملِ)
>
> رواه البخاري في الأدب المفرد وصحح إسناده ابن حجر في فتح الباري (ج١٠ ص٥١٠) وحسنه الألباني في صحيح الأدب المفرد (٦٠٥).
>
> You are living in a time of which its *fuqaha* [people of deep understanding] are many and its preachers are few, its askers are few and its givers are many, and action is the leader of *hawa*. And there will come after you a time of which its *fuqaha* are few and its preachers are many, its askers are many and its

> givers are few, and desire governs action. Know that at the end of times good demeanor is better than some action.
>
> Reported by al-Bukhari in *al-Adab al-Mufrad* and declared *sahih* by Ibn Hajar in *Fath al-Bari* (vol. 10, p. 510) and *hasan* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Adab al-Mufrad*, 605).

When we move according to the guidance of Allah, our desire becomes a follower. When we rebel, reject, or ignore what Allah loves, our desire leads. Today as Ibn Mas'ud noted, we are living in the time when *hawa* governs action.

We, except for few among us, have a strong attachment and love for some *haram*. And when we hear that what we love is contrary to what Allah loves, we notice some resistance and discomfort in our hearts, don't we? The question we have to ask ourselves whenever something like this happens is, who is the master of my heart, Allah or my *hawa*? Who is the ultimate judge and the governor of my life? Allah says in the Quran:

فَلَا وَرَبِّكَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ حَتَّىٰ يُحَكِّمُوكَ فِيمَا شَجَرَ
بَيْنَهُمْ ثُمَّ لَا يَجِدُوا۟ فِىٓ أَنفُسِهِمْ حَرَجًا مِّمَّا قَضَيْتَ
وَيُسَلِّمُوا۟ تَسْلِيمًا ٦٥

> By your Rabb, they will not [truly] believe until they make you—[O Muhammad]—judge concerning that over which they dispute among themselves and then find within themselves no discomfort from what you have judged and submit in [full, willing] submission.
>
> Al-Nisa' (Q4:65)

Have our hearts surrendered to Allah or do they resist Him?

The exoteric and the esoteric

One of the important lessons of this *hadith* is the intimate relationship between our outside and inside, between our actions and the condition of our heart. A serious obstacle on our way to Allah is disconnecting the Shari'ah of Islam from soul purification and believing that we can reach the end of this blessed path without the guidance of Allah's revealed law. The reality (*haqiqah*) of Islam is not distinct from its Shari'ah: both feed into each other. The more we worship Allah through the Shari'ah, the more that we will reach the *haqiqah* of Islam. And the more we have of the *haqiqah* of Islam, the more that we will worship Allah. Just consider how much the Prophet ﷺ used to worship Allah. As this *hadith* confirms, disobeying Allah leaves the heart ruined. How can a ruined heart, black and without light, hope to reach Allah? How can leaving or ignoring the Shari'ah square with a clean and healthy heart?

HADITH FOUR

الحديث الرابع

The influence between heart and body

قال رسول الله ﷺ: «البِرُّ ما سَكَنَتْ إليهِ النَّفْسُ واطْمَأنَّ إليهِ القَلبُ والإثْمُ ما لم تسْكُنْ إليهِ النَّفسُ ولم يَطْمَئِنَّ إليهِ القلبُ وإن أَفْتاكَ المُفْتونَ»

رواه أحمد وحسنه النووي وجود إسناده ابن رجب وصححه الألباني (صحيح الترغيب ١٧٣٥). وجاء عند مسلم (٢٥٥٣) بلفظ: «البِرُّ حُسنُ الخُلُقِ والإثمُ ما حاك في نفسكَ وكرهتَ أن يطَّلعَ عليهِ النَّاسُ»

The Messenger ﷺ said: «Virtue is what the soul is comfortable with and the heart is comfortable with, and sin is what the soul is uncomfortable with and the heart is uncomfortable with, despite what *fatwa*-givers might say.»

Reported by Ahmad. Al-Nawawi declared it *hasan*, Ibn Rajab declared its chain sound, and al-Albani declared it a sound *hadith* (*Sahih al-Targhib*, 1735). Imam Muslim (2553) reported the *hadith* as such: «Virtue is good character. And sin is what does not sit well with your soul and you hate that people would find out about it.»

Commentary

This *hadith* confirms the deep connection between our actions and our hearts, and how this relationship guides our behavior and choices. Virtue and righteousness agree with our hearts and souls and sit well with them, while sin and evil bring agitation, discomfort, and tension into our lives.

Our fitrah

Allah created all humans with the *fitrah*, the pure nature that loves Allah and recognizes Him as its Creator, Sustainer, and Guide. The Messenger ﷺ said:

> «كلُّ مولودٍ يولدُ على الفطرةِ»
>
> رواه البخاري (١٣٨٥).
>
> «Every newborn is born on the *fitrah*.»
>
> Reported by al-Bukhari (1385).

This pure nature finds its true happiness and comfort in loving and obeying Allah. Living a life of righteousness is the important piece of the puzzle that completes the soul and grants it meaning and direction in life. Since both the *fitrah* and Islam are from Allah, they are compatible and harmonious. In fact, in another *hadith*, the Messenger ﷺ explains:

> «كلُّ مولودٍ يولدُ على المِلَّة»
>
> رواه الترمذي (٢١٣٨) وصححه الألباني (صحيح الترمذي ٢١٣٨).
>
> «Every newborn is born on Islam.»
>
> Reported by al-Tirmidhi (2138) and declared *sahih* by al-Albani in *Sahih al-Tirmidhi* (2138).

Everyone is born with the belief of God in them, with love for virtue and aversion to sin. And so, when the religion from Allah is revealed detailing the do's and don'ts, the healthy *fitrah* welcomes these details and finds wisdom and happiness in them.

The agreement between our hearts and Allah's guidance is like bringing seeds and water to a fertile piece of land. The land is receptive and ready, healthy and full of potential. When we sow the seeds and water the land, we get a magnificent lush garden that gives nutritious and sweet fruits. The seeds and water unleash the potential of the land and take it to new heights. So does Allah's guidance—it brings life to the heart and adds to its strength, insight, peace, and wisdom; it transforms the heart into a garden of *iman*.

Sin, on the other hand, contradicts the fabric of the soul. Bringing sin into our lives is like trying to force the wrong-shaped piece into a jigsaw puzzle or machinery: it does not fit and causes damage as it's forced in. The machine then stops working and the puzzle is a mess that can never be finished. The only way to finish the puzzle and make the machine work again is to remove the wrong piece. If we bring here the example of the fertile land, sin would be like toxic waste to this land, poisoning the soil and killing the plants. And the longer it stays, the more it pollutes and kills. The waste compromises the land's yield, where either no fruits are produced or few that are sick and small. The health of the land is seriously jeopardized as it accepts more of this waste.

Going against Allah steals the beauty and harmony of our lives. A heart that is still connected to its primordial nature cannot accept sin and be at peace with it; it naturally rejects it. For this reason, what the heart feels can be a guide that helps determine the nature of an action and whether we should proceed with it or not. But this requires an uncorrupted *fitrah* and a healthy heart.

Virtue and Vice

The Prophet ﷺ defined *birr* (virtue) in the *hadith* as what gives tranquility and comfort to heart and soul. In the *hadith* reported by Muslim, he defines it as good character. Allah defines it in the Quran when He says:

ٱلۡبِرَّ مَنِ ٱتَّقَىٰۗ

Righteousness is in who avoids what Allah hates.
al-Baqarah (Q2:189)

And in another *ayah*:

وَلَٰكِنَّ ٱلْبِرَّ مَنْ ءَامَنَ بِٱللَّهِ وَٱلْيَوْمِ ٱلْءَاخِرِ وَٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةِ
وَٱلْكِتَٰبِ وَٱلنَّبِيِّۦنَ وَءَاتَى ٱلْمَالَ عَلَىٰ حُبِّهِۦ ذَوِى ٱلْقُرْبَىٰ وَٱلْيَتَٰمَىٰ
وَٱلْمَسَٰكِينَ وَٱبْنَ ٱلسَّبِيلِ وَٱلسَّآئِلِينَ وَفِى ٱلرِّقَابِ وَأَقَامَ
ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ وَءَاتَى ٱلزَّكَوٰةَ وَٱلْمُوفُونَ بِعَهْدِهِمْ إِذَا عَٰهَدُوا۟ ۖ
وَٱلصَّٰبِرِينَ فِى ٱلْبَأْسَآءِ وَٱلضَّرَّآءِ وَحِينَ ٱلْبَأْسِ ۗ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ
صَدَقُوا۟ ۖ وَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلْمُتَّقُونَ ﴿١٧٧﴾

> But righteousness is in one who believes in Allah, the Last Day, the Angels, the Book, and the Prophets and gives wealth, in spite of love for it, to relatives, orphans, the needy, the traveler, those who ask, and for freeing slaves; [and who] establishes prayer and gives Zakah; [who] fulfill their promise when they promise; and [who] are patient in poverty and hardship and during battle. Those are the honest ones, and it is those who are righteous.
>
> al-Baqarah (Q2:177)

Birr can refer to the proper way we ought to treat other people (hence good character), or all actions performed in Allah's obedience, hence the two definitions quoted from the Quran (see *Jami' al-Ulum wa al-Hikam*, *hadith* 26). This means that righteousness and vice are not empty categories to be filled by our feelings and reactions, but they are independent categories of beliefs and actions that are defined in Islam. Defining righteousness by the comfort we find in our hearts is looking at it through its internal reception and impact. In other words, what Allah loves and has commanded will produce this effect in our hearts. This is one definition, among others, and not the sum total of what *birr* means.

With sin, the *hadith* explains that it is what produces discomfort in the heart. According to the *hadith* reported by Muslim, sin is what doesn't sit well in the heart and keeps moving, like a nagging pain that does not go away. According to Ibn Mas'ud رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُ:

> قال ابن مسعود رضي الله عنه: (الإثمُ حَوَازُّ القُلوب)
>
> رواه الطبراني وصححه الإمام أحمد وابن رجب (جامع العلوم والحكم ج١ ص٢٠١)
>
> Sin is what leaves cutting marks in the heart.
>
> *Jami' al-Ulum wa al-Hikam* (vol. 1, p. 201).

It is hard for the heart to accept sin, and so the sinful idea and acts keep oscillating inside, like a knife moving back and forth. The instability that sin brings to the heart leaves cutting marks like those of a knife. And so when we find those disturbing feelings, they may be a strong sign that this act is wrong.

Since disobedience of Allah is inseparable from feelings of guilt and shame—granted that we have a living heart—sin would naturally be something that we would want to hide. The fact that one would want to hide sin also demonstrates that the odiousness of these acts is a shared conviction among people: most people disapprove of them. One of the benefits of this *hadith* is that living in a land or community where righteous convictions and reactions dominate helps one adhere to greater levels of piety.

Our heart as a guide

When do we use our hearts as compasses to tell right from wrong? And how can this work without turning religion, spirituality, and Islam into our own collection of personal wishes? There are those among us who grant to the heart the position of the final arbiter of the truth: If their hearts feel something, then it is true. The reference is almost or completely internal (i.e. the heart and how it feels), while external evidence (i.e. Quran, Sunnah, rational proofs) is secondary or unnecessary. This is why we sometimes hear statements like: (1) I feel that this is right so I am going to do it, (2) as long as our intention is good then our actions are good, or (3) this does not feel right so it must not be right.

Though the *hadith* does grant some authority to the heart, the comfort or discomfort that we find in our hearts cannot always have the final say. Having some discomfort with Allah's clear obligations or some inclination towards what Allah clearly prohibited is natural; it is part of this life's test. This is why Allah explains that evil could lurk behind what we love and bounties found hidden in what we hate. Allah says:

وَعَسَىٰٓ أَن تَكۡرَهُواْ شَيۡـٔٗا وَهُوَ خَيۡرٞ لَّكُمۡۖ
وَعَسَىٰٓ أَن تُحِبُّواْ شَيۡـٔٗا وَهُوَ شَرّٞ لَّكُمۡۚ
وَٱللَّهُ يَعۡلَمُ وَأَنتُمۡ لَا تَعۡلَمُونَ ٢١٦

And perhaps you might hate something and it be good for
you, and perhaps you might love something and it be bad
for you. And Allah knows and you do not.
al-Baqarah (Q2:216)

Our response to Allah's obligations and prohibitions should be to trust His wisdom, believe in His promises, and follow His revelation. The hesitation and discomfort we feel with Allah's commands stem from our human weaknesses and short-sightedness. Allah says:

وَمَا كَانَ لِمُؤۡمِنٖ وَلَا مُؤۡمِنَةٍ إِذَا قَضَى ٱللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُۥٓ أَمۡرًا أَن يَكُونَ
لَهُمُ ٱلۡخِيَرَةُ مِنۡ أَمۡرِهِمۡۗ وَمَن يَعۡصِ ٱللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُۥ فَقَدۡ ضَلَّ ضَلَٰلٗا
مُّبِينٗا ٣٦

And it is not for a believing man or a believing woman to have a
choice in a matter that Allah and His Messenger have decided. And
the one who disobeys Allah and His Messenger is clearly in error.
Al-Ahzab (Q33:36)

When we completely embrace and surrender to Allah's religion despite our desires and weaknesses, Allah fills our hearts with content, delight, and wisdom. We then find that what Allah has ordained agrees with our soul, heart, and body; and what Allah has prohibited contradicts our nature and is detrimental to our entire existence. When our hearts and minds are allowed to absorb all this—and this takes time—the hardship that may accompany our worship diminishes while our love for it increases; and our inclination towards the prohibited diminishes while our distaste for it mounts. Eventually, any hardship that comes with worship disappears and turns into delight, and inclinations towards sin become repulsions. Allah says:

وَلَٰكِنَّ ٱللَّهَ حَبَّبَ إِلَيۡكُمُ ٱلۡإِيمَٰنَ وَزَيَّنَهُۥ فِي قُلُوبِكُمۡ وَكَرَّهَ
إِلَيۡكُمُ ٱلۡكُفۡرَ وَٱلۡفُسُوقَ وَٱلۡعِصۡيَانَۚ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلرَّٰشِدُونَ ٧

But Allah made *iman* beloved to you and beautified it in your
hearts, and He made disbelief, great sins, and all disobedience
hated to you. Those are the guided.
Al-Hujurat (Q49:7)

The black heart, on the other hand, fails to distinguish between right and wrong, so its judgment cannot be trusted. As we saw in the *Hadith Three* in this book, the light of *iman* has departed from it, and so it lacks the purity to see and be happy with the truth. The sick heart has the light of *iman* mixed with infections and weaknesses (i.e. black spots along with white ones in the heart). Because of its sickness, this heart lacks the full ability to recognize and appreciate the truth, just like a diseased eye is too weak to see what the healthy eyes see, and a diseased ear is unable to hear like a healthy one. The sick heart will have an ability to tell right from wrong commensurate with how much *iman* it has in it; it will also fail to see the truth in proportion to the darkness and weakness in it. So, the sick heart has to be very careful about its emotional reactions.

It is the healthy and sound heart that benefits the most from the *hadith's* declaration that virtue and sin can be recognized despite what *fatwa*-givers might say. The *hadith* is not suggesting that we should do away with Allah's teachings in the Quran and Sunnah and rely instead on the judgment of our hearts. This would not only be the incorrect understanding of the *hadith*, but it would also contradict other *ayahs* and *hadiths* that exhort us to triumph against our weaknesses and to cling to the truth despite our emotions and opinions. When the Prophet ﷺ ratified the truce of al-Hudaybiyah, many of the Sahabah, including senior members, were distraught and disappointed. They did not see the wisdom of such an agreement and felt it was unjust. But the Prophet ﷺ affirmed that this was Allah's judgment and that Allah will never abandon him. Were the Sahabah then to listen to their hearts and ignore the judgment of Allah and His Prophet ﷺ, they would perish. But they submitted to Allah's judgment despite what they were feeling, and in time found out the great benefits of this agreement, which Allah called a victory in the Quran.

The sound heart can rely on its judgment in ambiguous matters that have no clear proofs and where there is no reliable religious scholar to consult. Here, the heart can lend insights that lead the people of *iman* to the truth. The heart that had been cleansed from doubts and desires is the most suited to see things as they are, to see beyond what other hearts can see. This is one of the blessings that Allah grants the righteous. The insight of this living heart in these cases is better than following guesswork or the advice of unqualified and unscrupulous *fatwa*-givers.

The *hadith* may also cover the times when a religious scholar gives the wrong *fatwa*, and we find our hearts uncomfortable with it. This is a trickier arena and is more difficult to discern because our resistance could simply be the influence of *hawa* or the whispers of Shaytan. But if the heart is clean and unbiased, it may be a sign that we need a second opinion, one where we are aware of the proofs and who said what and why.

The disease of the heart

The sickness of an organ or limb is its inability to do its job, what it has been created for. The sickness of the eye is its inability to see, and the sickness of the hand is its inability to grab and carry. The sickness of the heart is its failure to do what it was created for: to know Allah and love Him. Ibn al-Qayyim wrote:

> ومرضه هو نوع فساد يحصل له يفسد به تصوره للحق وإرادته له فلا يرى الحق حقا أو يراه على خلاف ما هو عليه أو ينقص إدراكه له وتفسد به إرادته له فيبغض الحق النافع أو يحب الباطل الضار أو يجتمعان له وهو الغالب ولهذا يفسر المرض الذي يعرض له تارة بالشك والريب كما قال مجاهد وقتادة في قوله تعالى ﴿فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ مَرَضٌ﴾ [البقرة: ١٠] أي شك وتارة بشهوة الزنا كما فسر به قوله تعالى ﴿فَيَطْمَعَ الَّذِي فِي قَلْبِهِ مَرَضٌ﴾ [الأحزاب: ٣٢] فالأول مرض الشبهة، والثاني مرض الشهوة.
>
> إغاثة اللهفان في مصايد الشيطان (طبعة المجمع ص٢٤).
>
> And the disease of the heart is a type of corruption that happens to it by which its understanding of the truth and desire for it are corrupted, so it does not see the truth as such, sees it as the opposite of what it is, or its sense of the truth is reduced and its desire is corrupted, and so it hates the beneficial truth or loves harmful falsehood, or both of these which is the more common situation. And this is why the disease it encounters is explained at times as doubts and suspicion, as Mujahid and Qatadah commented on Allah's saying ﴿There is disease in their hearts﴾ [al-Baqarah: 10] that

> this means doubt. And at times [it is explained] as the lust for fornication, as Allah's saying ﴾so the one who has disease in his heart may be tempted﴿ [al-Ahzab: 32] was explained as the *shahwah* for fornication. So the first is the disease of *shubhah* and the second is the disease of *shahwah*.
>
> *Ighathat al-Lahfan* (p. 24).

The sickness of the heart is in its beliefs, actions, or both. And the two diseases are in fact connected and lead to each other. How? Doubts in beliefs is a sickness in the heart, and it leads undoubtedly to weakness in its action, such as loving Allah and trusting Him. This in turn undermines the heart's resolve to reject sin. And when the actions of the hearts are weak, our *iman* decreases, and the heart grows even weaker as it fights more doubts and the whispers of Shaytan. Someone who is addicted to fornication is more likely to question its prohibition because of his love for it; here he went from the disease of desire (*shahwah*) to the disease of doubt (*shubhah*). And someone who questions the prohibition of alcohol is more likely to consume it; here he goes from the disease of *shubhah* (doubt)to the disease of *shahwah* (desire). When the heart is weakened by one disease, it loses the ability to fight others. When the heart is sick, the weakest *shubhah* and *shahwah* can disturb it and overtake it, influences that a strong and healthy heart can dismiss easily. It is exactly like the ability of a healthy body to fight off infections that a sick body would find fatal.

Two types of diseases

The diseases of the heart can also be divided based on their severity, the pain they cause, and the treatment they require into two types. The first is the more severe and harder to treat. These are the diseases of ignorance of the truth, *shubuhat* (doubts), and *shahawat* (desires). These diseases are the most painful but because the heart is drowning in ignorance, sin, and desire, it may not feel them. Whenever the heart tries to scream out of pain, we give it more of this disease to shut it up, like drugs to an addict. The cure to these diseases can only be found in the messages that Allah sent down to us. The failure to treat these illnesses leads to the gravest consequences in this life and the next, chief among them Hellfire. The second type of disease is less serious but more noticeable. Anger, sorrow, worry, and depression are all examples of this type of heart disease. Though these can be treated with some common-sense solutions, a better understanding of our own nature and personality, and wisdom gleaned from experience or elders; the best treatment for it is the one supplied by Allah. It is through Him that we understand our hearts and their needs best, and it is through Him that we differentiate between useful and harmful spiritual medicine. This does not mean that we cannot benefit from common sense treatments, for they in fact could prove helpful. What this means is that any treatment that fails to consult religion remains incomplete. If we try to cure our sorrow, for example, with the wrong medicine, we may only make it worse.

If we find ourselves suffering from stress and depression, we should take a second look at how our choices in life may be creating these conditions. If we keep importing Allah's displeasure into our lives, we will keep suffering from tension and anxiety. No matter how much we try to flood our heart with sins to try to soothe it, our heart will continue to resist and reject what contradicts its nature. The comfort that sin seemingly provides is but temporary relief that does not treat the problem but aggravates the addiction. Only by reverting back to Allah could hearts find lasting comfort.

HADITH FIVE

الحديث الخامس

The heart and forgetfulness

قال رسول الله ﷺ: «ما مِنَ القُلوبِ قَلْبٌ إلا وله سَحَابَةٌ كَسَحابَةِ القَمَرِ بَيْنا القمرُ مُضيئٌ إذْ عَلَتْ عَليهِ سَحابةٌ فأَظْلَمَ إذْ تَجَلَّتْ عنهُ فَأَضاءَ»

رواه الطبراني في الأوسط وأبو نعيم في الحلية وحسنه الألباني في السلسلة الصحيحة (٢٢٦٨).

The Messenger ﷺ said: «There is no heart except that it has a cloud like the clouds of the moon: while the moon is shining, it gets covered with a cloud and it gets dark; but when the cloud leaves it, the moon goes back to its shine.»

Reported by al-Tabarani in *al-Awsat* and Abu Naʿim in *al-Hilya*. It was declared *hasan* by al-Albani in *al-Silsilah al-Sahihah* (2268).

Commentary

We've seen so far, the vulnerability of the heart and how it reacts to our actions and choices in life. The *hadith* in this chapter further instructs us on the ups and downs of our hearts by drawing our attention to a common physical phenomenon.

The shine and the cloud

The heart of the faithful, or we can even say every human heart, has a light that shines from it. This light continues to radiate until the clouds move in and cover its splendor. And now, darkness has set. The brightness of the moon, however, is quickly restored when these clouds disperse and allow the beauty of the moon to shine through again.

The light of the moon in the *hadith* represents the light of faith. It can also represent the light of *fitrah* if we accept that the example in the *hadith* is referring to all hearts and not only Muslim hearts. What does this light do? It does not only enlighten its immediate surroundings but extends to cover the far reaches of this earth. And so is the light of *iman* in the heart of the believers: it radiates its surroundings and spreads *iman* and virtue around. Whether at work, in school, with family, or surrounded by strangers, when *iman* is alive in our hearts, it will push us to share its blessings and fruits with those around us. Helping others, advising them, receiving everyone with a smile, all this and more is the natural consequence of *iman*, the light that emanates from us to cover everyone and everything. Allah describes this light in the Quran as such:

ٱللَّهُ نُورُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ ۚ
مَثَلُ نُورِهِۦ كَمِشْكَوٰةٍ فِيهَا مِصْبَاحٌ ۖ ٱلْمِصْبَاحُ فِى زُجَاجَةٍ ۖ
ٱلزُّجَاجَةُ كَأَنَّهَا كَوْكَبٌ دُرِّىٌّ يُوقَدُ مِن شَجَرَةٍ مُّبَٰرَكَةٍ زَيْتُونَةٍ
لَّا شَرْقِيَّةٍ وَلَا غَرْبِيَّةٍ يَكَادُ زَيْتُهَا يُضِىٓءُ وَلَوْ لَمْ تَمْسَسْهُ نَارٌ ۚ
نُّورٌ عَلَىٰ نُورٍ ۚ يَهْدِى ٱللَّهُ لِنُورِهِۦ مَن يَشَآءُ ۚ وَيَضْرِبُ ٱللَّهُ ٱلْأَمْثَٰلَ
لِلنَّاسِ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَىْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٣٥﴾

> Allah is the light of the Heavens and the earth. The example of His light [in the heart of the believer] is like a niche that has in it a wick, and the wick is inside a glass. The glass is as if it is a brilliant, white star. It is lit by [the oil of] a blessed tree, an olive tree that is not eastern-located or western-located. Its oil almost radiates light even if untouched by fire. Light added to light.
>
> al-Nur (Q24:35)

The image in this *ayah* denotes the intensity of the light. The lamp is inside a niche to concentrate the light, and the glass and the oil themselves are brilliant and radiant. When the wick is lit, the light of the fire unleashes spectacular light that harnesses the potential and beauty of the oil, the glass, and the location of the lamp. And so is the light of faith in the heart of the believer. The *fitrah*, like the oil and glass, is pure and ready to receive the truth from its Creator. When Allah's revelation enters the heart, it is like fire adding light to the radiance of the *fitrah*. There is no tension or conflict here but light upon light. The divine revelation encounters in the believer's heart a spot ready to embrace it and grow with it. And when this happens, the light of the heart spreads to cover the believer's life, his/her family, the neighborhood, and possibly the city. The greater our *iman* is, the more it travels and transforms.

But like the moon, the life of the heart does encounter dark moments. The splendor of faith can be covered by clouds of sin, forgetfulness, and plain human weakness. The *hadith* explains that this is universal, and every heart must encounter it. The *hadith* also points out that this state is a temporary one in the life of the faithful, as is darkness when clouds obstruct the light of the moon. When we encounter these clouds—whether they be sins, drifting away from Allah, depression, sadness over the past, or anguish over the future—we must remember that, with Allah's help, we have the ability to push these clouds away and restore the light of *iman* in our hearts. We must remember that the clouds are not a permanent part of the moon but the light is. Clouds come but must go. It is the light that stays.

The rise and fall and…rise of iman

We all have felt the increase and decrease of *iman* in our hearts. The Quran talks about it too. This is a natural part of being human on this earth, to be around influences that elevate our *iman* and then around others that bring it down. If the pleasure and love of Allah is our final destination, we have to maneuver all of these terrains while keeping a net gain of *iman*. To do this, we have to understand our nature and the nature of the world around us better. One of the facts that is important to remember is that we pass through periods of fluctuations, and what we set to do is affected by them. The following *hadith* from the Prophet ﷺ explains this:

> «لِكُلِّ عملٍ شِرَّةٌ ولِكُلِّ شِرَّةٍ فَتْرَةٌ فمن كانَت فترتُهُ إلى سنَّتي فَقد أفلحَ ومَن كانت إلى غيرِ ذلِكَ فقد هلَكَ»
>
> رواه أحمد وصححه أحمد شاكر في تحقيقه للمسند والألباني (صحيح الترغيب والترهيب ٥٧).
>
> «Every type of action will experience a period of enthusiasm and energy, and every such period will experience a period of weakness and decline of interest. So, the one whose period of weakness is upon my Sunnah will be saved. But if it is otherwise, they will perish.»
>
> Reported by Imam Ahmad and declared *sahih* by Ahmad Shakir and al-Albani (*Sahih al-Targhib*, 57).

Our mood changes, our interest in what we do changes, and our religious and professional productivity changes as a result. The *hadith* explains that there will be times when we will have the energy and desire to do what we ought to, and we should take full advantage of this and not waste the opportunity. This is the time when we will be most productive. But this does not and cannot last. Our energy and interest will wane, and this will be the time when we are our weakest and most vulnerable to the whispers of Shaytan. This is the time when our desires can overtake us. The Prophet ﷺ advised us to take care of these weak periods and not let them destroy everything that we've built so far. We cannot allow the weak period of *iman* to undo the good we did when our *iman* was strong. Allah the Most Wise says:

وَلَا تَكُونُوا۟ كَٱلَّتِى نَقَضَتْ غَزْلَهَا مِنۢ بَعْدِ قُوَّةٍ أَنكَٰثًا

And do not be like her who unraveled the yarn she spun into threads.
Al-Nahl (Q16:92)

This is an example of one who unmakes in minutes what took them hours to achieve. The black mark in our hearts that we worked so hard to erase is brought back in a moment of weakness, and the good deed in our record is counterbalanced now by this act of disobedience (the good brought a +1 to our scale, the bad brought a -1).

This is why the Prophet ﷺ asked us to not depart from the Sunnah, his way and path, when we are weak. At that time we may not have the *iman* and energy to be our best, but we can hold on to the truth, to our minimum practice, and abstain from *haram* until the light comes back. And the light will come back by the Will of Allah. What is crucial is that we do not sabotage our life and our journey to Allah when we are down. Some of us have the tendency to be really bad when our *iman* is weak, and really good when it is strong. The Prophet ﷺ is asking us to protect our weak moments so we can escape them unharmed. If we cannot do a lot of good then, we should at least avoid the *haram*.

Clouds vary in their number, size, density, and how long they stay covering the moon. Though we all will experience these clouds, we won't all experience them in the same way. Those strongest in *iman* will be least affected by them; their clouds will be smaller and will depart swiftly. Their recovery is fast because they resort to their *adhkar* (remembrance of Allah) and worship, and their *iman* gets replenished and restored. Others experience bigger and darker clouds because of the trouble they have in their *iman*; and their clouds linger because they don't lean on the Islamic remedies that chase away the darkness. Though the clouds are inevitable, they are alterable. We should all aspire and work towards smaller and briefer clouds. To do this, we need better care of our hearts and souls.

Siyasat al-Nafs

Moving our souls and hearts closer to Allah requires care, tact, and wisdom. The word *siyasah* in Arabic means the management of affairs, whether that be of animals or people. The *siyasah* of an animal, such as grooming a horse, means knowing how to treat it in order to get it to do what you want from it. For example, it means understanding how to tame a wild horse or training another into becoming a race champion. The grooming of any horse must rely on intimate knowledge of the nature of horses, the particular personality and potential of the horse being trained, and clear achievable goals. Without all this, the training will be a failure.

The *siyasah* of our hearts and souls is choosing the best path we can put them on to reach Allah. We similarly need to understand our own personalities, the nature of Islam, and the specific goals that we want to achieve. In the *siyasah* of our hearts and souls, we must pay close attention to the following:

Gradualism

Whatever we want to overcome or add to our life, we have to remember that change takes time. The bad habits we possess have been with us for a long time, and it's not realistic to expect them to go away overnight. It takes time and patience, so we shouldn't despair because of occasional failure and setbacks. Our eyes should stay focused on Jannah as the prize; this will keep us motivated. Similarly, new good habits we want to adopt (e.g. voluntary prayers, fasting, remembering Allah) need their time to be integrated into our life. Listen carefully to this *hadith* from the Prophet ﷺ:

«سَدِّدوا وقارِبوا واغدوا وروحوا وشيءٌ من الدُّلْجَة والقَصْدَ القصدَ تَبلُغوا»

رواه البخاري (٦٤٦٣)

«Seek what's right or come close to it. And travel early in the

> morning, in the afternoon, and part of the night. And seek moderation, seek moderation, and you will arrive.»
>
> Sahih al-Bukhari (6463).

In this *hadith*, the Prophet ﷺ is asking us to adopt the middle path of moderation that will securely take us to Allah. He told us that if we are unable perform what we are asked to do, then we should come as close to it as possible. And in our journey to Allah, we should seek opportune times for our travel without burdening ourselves. This will keep our pace regular and consistent; this is how we reach our destination. Unbalanced and unplanned travel drains all of our energy and halts our progress; we are likely to never reach our goal. This invaluable prophetic advice takes into account our human nature. If we excessively push ourselves, we will get bored, tired, and our souls will eventually rebel. We will be like the one who rode his horse without rest until he killed it, never reaching his destination. The Prophet ﷺ said:

> «إنَّ الدِّينَ يُسْرٌ ولَنْ يُشادَّ الدِّينَ أحدٌ إلا غَلَبَه»
>
> رواه البخاري (٣٩).
>
> «Religion is easy, and one who overburdens himself in his religion will be overpowered by it [i.e. will not be able to continue on his extreme path.]»
>
> Reported by al-Bukhari (39).

And in another similar *hadith*:

> «إِنَّ هذا الدِّينَ مَتينٌ فأَوْغِلُوا فيه بِرِفْقٍ»
>
> حسنه الألباني في صحيح الجامع (٢٢٤٦).
>
> «This religion is strong, so go through it gently.»
>
> Al-Albani declared it *hasan* (*Sahih al-Jami*ʿ, 2246).

Religious sentiments and practice need their time to mature in our lives, and we should take them on incrementally. The Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ was to be constant and consistent in his practice and not intermittent. Our plan in life should be to gently add more of what Allah loves in our lives. This moderate pace allows us to make our gains permanent. And when they become permanent, we can confidently add more to them without fear of losing them.

Let's take reading the Quran as an example. If we want to start a regimen of reading the Quran, we cannot realistically expect to start with ten or even five *juz'* a day. If we try this, as the *hadith* predicts, we will burn out soon and stop the whole project. And we may not come back to it because of our negative experience. The *siyasah* here would be to start with a portion that we can commit to every day, five or ten pages. After this portion has become a staple in our lives, which could take a month of two, we can add five or ten more pages to our daily reading. And after this becomes a constant, we can add more.

We should be aware not to morph gradualism into procrastination. Our self is lazy by nature and favors ease and comfort. To be saved from Hell and attain the highest degrees in Heaven, we have to push it. We push ourselves in worldly matters to achieve something meaningful, and it is the same idea when it comes to the Hereafter, except that the stakes are much higher.

Balance

We have different needs: religious, physical, emotional, recreational, etc. Failure to satisfy these needs brings on an imbalance that affects the other areas and our overall performance. It was from the guidance of the Prophet ﷺ to give each side its due and to discourage excessiveness in one area. This what he ﷺ confirmed in the following incident:

آخَى النبيُّ صلَّى اللهُ عليه وسلَّم بين سَلمانَ وأبي الدَّرداءِ فزار سَلمانُ أبا
الدَّرداءِ فرأَى أمَّ الدَّرداءِ مُتَبَذِّلَةً فقال لها (ما شأنُكِ؟) قالتْ (أخوك أبو

> الدَّرداءِ ليس له حاجةٌ في الدنيا) فجاء أبو الدَّرداءِ فصنَع له طعامًا فقال (كُلْ) قال (فإني صائمٌ) قال (ما أنا بآكِلٍ حتى تأكُلَ) قال فأكَل فلما كان الليلُ ذهَب أبو الدَّرداءِ يقومُ قال (نَمْ) فنام ثم ذهَب يقومُ فقال (نَمْ) فلما كان من آخِرِ الليلِ قال سَلمانُ (قُمِ الآنَ) فصَلَّيا فقال له سَلمانُ (إنَّ لربِّكَ عليك حقًّا ولنفسك عليك حقًّا ولأهلِك عليك حقًّا فأعطِ كلَّ ذي حقٍّ حقَّه) فأتَى النبيَّ صلَّى اللهُ عليه وسلَّم فذكَر ذلك له فقال النبيُّ صلَّى اللهُ عليه وسلَّم «صدَق سَلمانُ»
>
> رواه البخاري (١٩٦٨).

> The Messenger ﷺ united between Salman and Abu al-Darda' in brotherhood. When Salman visited Abu al-Darda' he found Umm al-Darda' wearing shabby clothes and he asked her: "What is the matter?" She replied: "Your brother Abu al-Darda' has no interest in the world." So Abu al-Darda' arrived and made food for Salman and said: "Eat, for I am fasting." Salman said: "I will not eat until you eat." So he ate. Then at night Abu al-Darda' went to pray but Salman said: "Sleep." So he slept. Then he went to pray but Salman said: "Sleep." Then when it was at the latter part of the night Salman said: "Go now." So they both prayed. Then Salman said to him: "Indeed, Allah has a right upon you, and yourself has a right upon you, and your family has a right upon you, so give each the right that is due to it." So Abu al-Darda' went to the Prophet ﷺ and told him about it and the Prophet ﷺ said: «Salman has spoken the truth.»
>
> Reported by al-Bukhari (1968).

We cannot allow our religious enthusiasm to run unrestrained and destroy other parts of our lives, especially when we know that all of them are connected. Neglect in one area undermines the others. Wahb ibn Munabbih said:

> قال وهب بن منبه: (مكتوب في حكمة آل داود حقٌ على العاقل أن لا يغفل عن أربع ساعات ساعة يناجى فيها ربه وساعة يحاسب فيها نفسه وساعة يخلو فيها مع إخوانه الذين يخبرونه بعيوبه ويصدقونه عن نفسه وساعة يخلى فيها بين نفسه وبين لذاتها فيما يحل ويجمل فإن في هذه الساعة عونا على تلك الساعات وإجماماً للقلوب)
>
> رواه ابن أبي الدنيا في محاسبة النفس (ص٣٠).
>
> It is written in the Wisdom of David that it is incumbent upon the wise not to miss four hours. The first is the hour when he is alone, conversing with Allah. The second is the hour when he checks and reviews his actions. The third is the hour when he is alone with his brothers who are honest with him about his faults and what he is truly like. And the fourth is the hour when he lets himself satisfy his desires, in what is *halal* and decent, for this hour is one that aids in attaining the other hours and it is a relaxation and refreshment for the hearts.
>
> Ibn Abi al-Dunya in *Muhasabat al-Nafs* (p. 30).

Balance, of course, is not the same as neglecting the commands of Allah in the name of moderation. Real moderation is adhering to Allah's religion in the way the Prophet ﷺ did. Ignoring the commands of Allah is to compromise the greatest right we have upon us, which itself is an imbalance and extreme stance no matter what name we give to it.

Balance should not only exist between our religious and worldly obligations but in our religious affairs as well. Balance between love, fear, and hope in our worship of Allah is the mark of a true believer. There is balance between the worship of the heart and the body, between patience and gratitude, and between learning and application of what we learn.

Assistance

Our journey to Allah will take us through twists and turns, valleys and hills. Some days will be easy while others hard and testing. Throughout this journey, we need support to keep us strong and supply us with the energy to forge ahead despite frustrations and opposition.

The main source of our support is Allah, having trust in Him and relying on Him to help us reach our goals and to protect us from harm. Through reading the Quran and *dhikr* we remind ourselves of how close Allah is to us and how much He is willing to help us if we just turn to Him. Through *du‘a*, we keep asking Allah for patience, protection, and help. Quran, dhikr, and *du‘a* are the trifecta we must have for a strong relationship with Allah.

One *dhikr* that we should pay special attention to is (لا حول ولا قوة إلا بالله), which means that we have no power or ability without Allah's help. It is a *dhikr* that, when understood and repeated, brings humility and complete reliance on Allah, which in turn brings about Allah's assistance and care. Whenever we want to do something challenging, it would be wise to keep this *dhikr* close to our hearts and tongues.

Understand yourself

Since we have different personalities, strengths, and weaknesses, our path to Allah will look slightly different from the person next to us. Understanding our needs and who we are is not a simple matter but is essential if we wish to successfully care for our hearts and souls. There is no alternative to understanding ourselves better: what we are good at, areas that need improvement, our important personal needs, and what we can learn to live without. This all requires serious and frequent introspection where we observe our reactions, learn from our mistakes, ask questions of ourselves, and try new approaches and practices. The insights that we collect from all this, necessarily coupled with the teachings of Islam, will grant us the best map to the harbor of Jannah.

When we look at the life of the pious predecessors, we will clearly see how their choices reflected their particular needs and strengths. There were those among the Sahabah who chose to stay poor while others were rich. Some specialized in the Quran, others in *hadith*, and others were fighting on the Muslim frontiers. Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal lived on the humblest of food but a great imam like al-Thawri would pack in his travels fine sweets and barbecued meat and say:

> كان سفيان الثوري يحمل في سفره الفالوذج والحمل المشوي ويقول (إن الدابة إذا أحسن إليها عملت).
>
> صيد الخاطر (ص٧٨).
>
> If you are nice to your animal, it will work for you.
>
> *Sayd al-Khatir* (p. 78).

This means that if you treat yourself right and give it what it needs, it will be compliant and give you what you ask of it. He understood himself well, and knew that this is what he needed to keep himself energized and interested. As al-Hasan al-Basri said:

> قال الحسن: (نفوسكم مطاياكم إلى ربكم فأصلحوا مطاياكم توصلكم إلى ربكم)
>
> لطائف المعارف (ص١٢٥).
>
> You are your rides that take you to Allah, so take care of yourselves and they will carry you to Him.
>
> *Lata’if al-Ma‘arif* (p. 125).

All this highlights the importance of understanding our personality type. What are the things that attract me to Islam? How can I build on them to strengthen my religious attachments? How can I motivate myself to worship Allah more and be closer to Him? What kind of *halal* helps me to achieve this goal? What is my weakness? What are the harmful and sinful things I am attracted to and how can I overcome their influence? We need a combination of personal reflections and Islamic learning to answer these questions. Then, just like the great Muslims of the past, we will learn our strengths and we will cultivate them, and we will take note of our weaknesses and we will address them.

Project

Spend time reflecting on your character and personality. Now, choose one thing that is troubling you and would like to change. You are free to choose more than one, but it easier at this stage to focus your energy and attention on one thing. This should be a recurring problem that brings constant pain and trouble. It could be a character flaw, like anger. Or it could be excessive materialism, where our happiness and interest are tied to consumption and brands. Or it could be leisure time that we spend unwisely. Or it could be nosiness that puts us in trouble and brings our heart aches and pains.

Now, isolate this thing and try to define it. You can use a journal for this, which can be your "Heart Journal." Write a full definition and description of it. For example, I get angry (describe how) when this happens (describe the words, deeds, and people). Ask yourself now why these things make you angry. Then, jot down what your reaction says about you (your sensitivities and expectations)? What does this reveal about the attachments you have? Attachment to ego, material attachments, attachments to past emotional injuries, fear of the unknown future? Write it down and be honest. Now you are looking at the core causes of the problem. The people, words, and deeds are secondary at this point. Your main concern are the causes that you identified. Treating them is what your heart and soul really needs.

Your angry reactions will change when the cause of your anger is ameliorated or treated. But this will need time and dedication. Another area you can work on for more immediate results is your physical reactions. Note these reactions and see how changing them can produce different and better results. For instance, what are the words I say and things I do that inflame the situation? How can I control my temper? How can I wrest from others the power to control my reactions and emotions? How can I change my responses to help change the people around me? You will need to study the Islamic treatments of anger and the manners of the early Muslim generation for successful answers.

Work on the issue you identified and note improvements. Keep at it and record your successes. Learn from this treatment and repeat it with another problem.

You may not be able to stop the cause of your anger, but you can control it by adjusting your reactions. We cannot control the arrival of the dark clouds but we have control over how long they stay and how big they are.

Recognize the clouds in your life, your personal clouds that keep covering your heart. This is the first step towards living a life that is close to Allah and is conscious of your heart and soul. And do not despair when it gets dark.

Treating the heart is much like treating the body in that they both need nourishment, protection from external harm, and the extraction of harm that made it in. The nourishment of the heart is found in its *iman* and adhering to the recurrent rituals and the *dhikr* of Allah. When the heart stays away from sin, it protects itself from external harm. And when it slips and makes mistakes, sincere repentance and asking for Allah's forgiveness cleanse it from internal harm. Remember these three elements and use them in combination to treat your heart.

HADITH SIX

الحديث السادس

The heart is either rich or poor

قال رسول الله ﷺ: «يا أبا ذَرٍّ أَتَرى أنَّ كَثْرَةَ المالِ هو الغِنَى إنَّما الغِنَى غِنَى القلبِ والفقرُ فقرُ القلبِ مَنْ كانَ الغِنَى فِي قلبِهِ فلا يَضُرُّهُ ما لَقِيَ مِنَ الدُّنيا ومَنْ كانَ الفقرُ في قلبِهِ فلا يُغنيهِ ما أُكْثِرَ لهُ مِنَ الدُّنيا وإنَّما يَضُرُّ نَفْسَهُ شُحُّها»

رواه ابن حبان و الطبراني و صححه الألباني (صحيح الجامع ٧٨١٦).

The Messenger ﷺ said: «O Abu Dharr, do you suppose that abundance of wealth is affluence? Affluence is the richness of the heart and poverty is the poverty of the heart. The one who is rich in heart will not be harmed by what they face in this world, and the one who is poor in heart will not be enriched by how much they acquire of this world. What harms his self is its *shuh* [i.e. avarice].»

Reported by Ibn Hibban and al-Tabarani and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Jami‘*, 7816).

Commentary

There are two types of hearts: the rich heart and the poor heart. The Prophet ﷺ explained that the influence of the outside world—the benefits and harms the world brings to us—depends on which of these two hearts we possess. In this conversation with one of his Companions who was known for his *zuhd* (worldly detachment), Prophet Muhammad ﷺ redefines what constitutes wealth in this world. There is the superficial/external and material poverty and affluence, which for most is the mark of economic and social rank, and there is the more important richness and poverty of the heart. And it is the latter that truly matters in the sight of Allah, His Prophet, and the pious believers.

Internal vs. external poverty

Human were created weak, in need of outside help to sustain their life. We need to eat and drink because we are not physically self-sufficient. We are also constantly in need of help from others. And just as our physical life is not possible without outside interventions, so is our spiritual existence impossible without outside guidance. We spend all of our lives looking for this "thing," hoping to find what could fill the void inside. Some of us believe fame and recognition are the sources of happiness. Some rely on professional success, while others put their trust in family and friends. All these goals, however, are temporary. No matter how much we try to cling to them and find peace through them, we recognize at one point or another two important things: they do not last, and they fall significantly short of satisfying our different needs. They fail to be the "thing" that could fully bring peace to our hearts.

Our unending needs spur our hearts to keep looking and searching for answers. Allah describes our state in the Quran when He says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ أَنتُمُ ٱلۡفُقَرَآءُ إِلَى ٱللَّهِۖ وَٱللَّهُ هُوَ ٱلۡغَنِيُّ ٱلۡحَمِيدُ ١٥

> O people, you are poor [i.e. in a state of need] in your relationship with Allah,while Allah is the Rich [i.e. free from need] and Praiseworthy.
>
> Fatir (Q35:15)

Our need for our Creator is eternal: it never goes away. He is the One who gave us our physical existence, and He is the One who is keeping us alive every moment of everyday. He sustains our existence with nourishment, protects it from harm, and guides us to how we can take care of it. Just as our physical life cannot continue without Him, our spiritual life cannot exist without Him. Allah says about the source of this spiritual life:

يَـٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ ٱسْتَجِيبُوا۟ لِلَّهِ وَلِلرَّسُولِ إِذَا دَعَاكُمْ لِمَا يُحْيِيكُمْ ۖ

O you who have *iman*, respond to Allah and the Messenger
when He calls you to what gives life to you.
Al-Anfal (Q8:24)

Allah enlivens the heart as he does the body. He sustains the life of our hearts with his revelation and guidance. They are the food that our hearts need to grow, the medicine that our hearts need to heal, and the guide our hearts need to stay safe and prosperous. The hearts can only be made whole, be enriched, by the One who gave them life. The keys to satisfying our needs and healing our anxiety are with Allah. The one who truly desires to eradicate the poverty of their heart needs to go the source of life and richness in this world.

The poverty of our hearts is of two kinds. The first type of poverty is one that never goes away. This is our constant and eternal need for Allah, an essential part of being human. The other type of poverty is the vacancy and emptiness of the heart when Allah and His love are absent. The *hadith* addresses the second kind type of poverty, the one we can overcome. This is when the heart either does not know Allah or does not receive this knowledge with positive emotions and intentions.

When knowledge is missing from the heart, it will have a nonexistent, incomplete, or distorted understanding of who Allah is. Because of this ignorance, the heart fails to be attracted to Allah and remains empty. The other deficiency is when the heart possesses knowledge of Allah but fails to act on it, and so does not taste the fruits and sweetness of this knowledge. Because of this deficiency, the heart searches elsewhere for love and connection, looking in all the wrong places except in the one where it should. When the heart, out of its inherent need, tries to attach itself completely to other humans or material possessions, it does not receive the comfort it seeks. Selfishness, betrayal, unrequited love, and fizzling emotions are some of what plagues human relationships. And even when we are in the grip of a wonderful relationship, we will still notice that it cannot provide us with all the comfort we seek or satisfy all the needs we have. We seek perfection in what we admire and love, and we want them to accept our weaknesses and imperfections. We seek love untinged with resentment or the possibility of decay, yet our worldly love brings with it the anticipation and experience of real pain and the heartache of loss. We seek a love that is so overwhelming and lasting that it can chase all our worries away. We want to be with the one who can make our existence meaningful, who eliminates the abyss of nothingness and meaninglessness. No human love can give us all that. It is only love for the Perfect, our Creator, that can fill all of these needs.

Physical and spiritual poverty have few things in common. The one who is physically poor usually has (1) inferior possessions; (2) needs that go unmet, which brings pain and sorrow; (3) expects to not be able to fulfill future needs, bringing more anxiety and sorrow; (4) searches frantically for material solutions; and (5) does not have extra wealth to help others. The one who is poor at heart similarly:

1. Has inferior possessions in his heart: goals, emotions, and intentions. Since the heart is attached to earthly and only earthly goals, it is not elevated beyond its limitations. It also has spiritual diseases that make it selfish, envious, angry, and ungrateful.
2. His needs are never fully or adequately met. He is never fully happy. There is always something missing from what he has, an incompleteness to anything that life brings, especially the big moments that we look forward to. His goals fail to please him as he imagined they would, and he feels it. He lives with regret and pain.

3. His fear and anxiety mount as he thinks about the future. If life is painful and meaningless now, how can the future be any better? The emptiness he feels now is likely to only grow with time.
4. Scours everywhere for meaning, only to be dissatisfied with it and to move to something else. He will always keep looking and will always be disappointed.
5. He is hurting inside and has little ability to help others. How can he help others if he cannot help himself?

The difference between the poverty of heart and body is that the needs of the body are temporary and can be satisfied with little money. But the needs of the heart are more serious and damaging. If the heart is poor, it does not matter how materially affluent we may be. We will never be fully satisfied with wealth if our hearts are poor; we will always seek more of it because none of it is ever enough. Ironically, the one who is poor at heart, with all of his fervent pursuits for wealth, will look as if he has nothing. His internal poverty is translated into an external one. His fear of loss may even push him to be a miser and live the life of the poor!

External and internal richness

Impermanence perturbs us. The possibility of losing what we love is our greatest fear. What brings serenity to our hearts is the perfection and eternality of the Creator. Richness of heart comes from attaching our hearts to Allah and following His guidance. This heart surrenders to Allah and is content with what He gives us. This heart receives Allah's commands with love and gratitude. This heart knows that when it puts its trust in Allah and loves Him, it puts its trust in the Wise, the Merciful, the Powerful, the Loving, and Creator of all. The heart no longer fears the world when it is close to Allah. It knows that whatever Allah has destined, He did with profound wisdom and care. It also knows that the difficulties of this life do not last, and will be substituted with the unbelievable joy of Paradise. Plus, whenever the heart is burdened, it knows that it can call on its Creator to help it and comfort it. Simply turning to Him is the tonic of the soul. The heart no longer sorrows when it is close to Allah. When the heart loves and trusts Allah, it discovers that it needs no one and nothing other than Him. It becomes rich because of Allah, independent of worldly concerns and achievements. Ibn Mas‘ud رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُ said:

> قال ابن مسعود رضي الله عنه: (إِنَّ اللهَ تَعالَى يُعْطِي الْمالَ مَنْ أَحَبَّ وَمَنْ لا يُحِبُّ وَلا يُعْطِي الإِيمانَ إِلَّا مَنْ يُحِبُّ)
>
> رواه البخاري في الأدب المفرد وصححه الألباني (صحيح الأدب المفرد ٢٠٩).
>
> Indeed Allah grants wealth to the one He loves and the one He does not love, but He only grants *iman* to those whom He loves.
>
> Reported by al-Bukhari in *al-Adab al-Mufrad* and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Adab al-Mufrad*, 209).

The believer does not look at wealth as a sign of Allah's favor. He believes deep in his heart that Allah gives him what he needs, what is best for him at this time and place, and protects him from what brings him harm. Since Allah's actions are all wise, the believer is content with whatever happens in his/her life. And since his heart is filled with His love, it no longer worries about or because of this world. The heart has been freed from its earthly prison: it is not happy or sad because of this world. What the believer cares about and views as a sign of Allah's favor is the faith in his/her heart. The presence of such faith is the sign that Allah loves us. And if Allah does love you, what else is there to worry about or fret over?

What helps establish contentment in our hearts is believing that our worth is not tied to how much we make, what people think of us, if they even notice us, or our station in society. What further cements this contentment is believing that what we desire but fail to receive in this life only brings us closer to Allah. In an extended reporting of the conversation with Abu Dharr, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ offered a physical demonstration of the lesson he was teaching him and us:

> ثُمَّ سألني عن رجلٍ من قريشٍ قالَ «هَلْ تعرفُ فُلانًا؟» قلتُ (نعم يا رسولَ الله) قال «فكيفَ تَراهُ أو تُراهُ؟» قلتُ (إذا سألَ أُعْطِيَ وإذا حَضَرَ أُدخِلَ) قالَ ثُمَّ سأَلني عَنْ رجُلٍ مِن أهْلِ الصُّفَّةِ فقال «هل تعْرِفُ فلانًا؟» قُلتُ (لا واللهِ لا أعرفُهُ يا رسولَ اللهِ) فما زالَ يُحَلِّيهِ ويَنْعَتُهُ حتَّى عرفتُهُ فقلتُ (قدْ عرفتُهُ يا رسولَ الله) قال «فكيفَ تَراهُ أو تُراهُ؟» قلتُ (هوَ رجلٌ مسكينٌ من أهلِ الصُّفَّةِ) قالَ «فهوَ خيرٌ من طِلاعِ الأرضِ منَ الآخر» قُلتُ (يا رسولَ اللهِ أفلا يُعْطي مِن بعضِ ما يُعْطي الآخرُ؟) فقالَ «إذا أُعْطِيَ خيرًا فهو أَهْلُهُ وإذا صُرِفَ عنهُ فقد أُعْطِيَ حَسَنَةً»
>
> رواه ابن حبان والحاكم وصححه الألباني (صحيح الترغيب ٣٢٠٣).

> Then he asked me about a man from Quraysh. He said: «Do you know so and so?» I said: "Yes, O Messenger of Allah." He asked: «What do you think of him?» I replied: "He is one who if he asks, his request is granted. And if he comes to a place, he will be welcomed in." Then he asked me about a man from the people of Suffah [masjid residents] and said: «Do you know so and so?» I replied: "No, by Allah I do not know him O Messenger of Allah." So he described him until I recognized him and said: "I know him O Messenger of Allah." He asked: «What do you think of him?» I replied: "He is a poor man from the people of Suffah." He said: «He is better than the earth's fill of the other.» I asked: "O Messenger of Allah, shouldn't he be given some of what the other person is

> given?” He replied: «If he is given wealth, he deserves it. But if not, he will earn a good deed.»
>
> Reported by Ibn Hibban and al-Hakim and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Targhib*, 3203).

The comparison is struck between a wealthy and respected man from the prominent tribe of Quraysh and a man from the people of Suffah, a poor group of Companions whose only shelter was the mosque. The social esteem and recognition that the wealthy man received and the obscurity and poverty of the second masked their real worth with Allah. On the inside, the poor man turned out to be the much richer one. And if he was denied some worldly wealth, it only elevated him in status with Allah: what he lacked is counted for him as a good deed. So when the believer notices that others have what he does not, he remembers all this and sees in it a favor from Allah. This knowledge fills his heart with comfort and joy.

The rich-hearted may not own a lot but carries himself with astounding dignity. His heart is not dependent on other people and doesn’t expect things from them. His heart is rather linked to his Creator. Consequently, he does not rely on people for his needs and hardly asks them for anything. He asks Allah alone for what he wants and is content with the little he may have. And he is generous with what he owns as if he is rich, more than the poor-hearted can ever do. The believer comprehends a very important reality: his relationship with Allah provides him with all that he needs and more. The Prophet ﷺ said:

> «يقولُ ربُّكُم (يا ابْنَ آدَمَ تَفَرَّغْ لِعبادتِي أملأْ قلْبَكَ غِنًى وأملأْ يدَيْكَ رِزقًا
> يا ابنَ آدمَ لا تُباعِدْ مِنِّي أملأْ قلبَكَ فَقْرًا وأملأْ يدَيْكَ شُغْلًا)»
> رواه أبو نعيم في الحلية وصححه الألباني (صحيح الترغيب ٣١٦٥).
>
> «Your Rabb says: “O child of Adam! Dedicate yourself to my worship and I shall fill your heart with riches and your hands

> with provisions. O child of Adam! Do not distance yourself from me or I will fill your heart with poverty and your hands with busywork.”»
>
> Reported by Abu Naʿim in *al-Hilya* and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Targhib*, 3165).

Allah’s worship enriches the worshiper internally and externally, chasing away the poverty of heart and body. But when one moves away from Allah and His guidance, his heart will be full of poverty—as he distances himself from the source of all richness—and his body will be always busy. His over-crammed life never earns him a feeling of satisfaction; he will always feel poor and in need. In fact, he may be losing a lot of his wealth without even realizing.

It is worth our reflection to consider how much we tend to flee material poverty but not the spiritual one, and how much we chase after material affluence but not the richness of the heart. Whatever we collect of this world is destined to perish, and yet we cling to it like it never will. To be rich of heart will not only bring us eternal joy and comfort in the next life but it helps us here and now too. The rich heart, as the *hadith* confirms, is not disturbed by the fluctuations of this life; it is immune to its charm and threats because it has risen above them. The poor heart, on the other hand, keeps running after this world without end; the best things in this world fail to bring it happiness. In fact, they are killing him. It is reported that Jesus عَلَيۡهِٱلسَّلَامُ said:

> قَالَ عيسَى ابنُ مَرْيَمَ عليه السَّلَام: (طَالِبُ الدُّنْيَا مِثْلُ شَارِبِ مَاءِ الْبَحْرِ
> كُلَّمَا ازْدَادَ شُرْبًا ازْدَادَ عَطَشًا حَتَّى يَقْتُلَهُ)
>
> الزهد لابن أبي الدنيا (ص١٥١).
>
> The seeker of this world is like the drinker of sea water: the more he drinks, the thirstier he gets until it kills him.
>
> *Al-Zuhd* (p. 151) by Ibn Abi al-Dunya.

Is poverty desirable?

Many of the Companions of the Prophet ﷺ were poor, especially at the beginning of Islam. Here is an example:

> كان رسولُ اللهِ صلَّى اللهُ عليهِ وسلَّمَ إذا صلَّى بالناسِ خرَّ رجالٌ من قامتِهم في الصلاةِ لما بهم من الخَصاصةِ وهم من أصحابِ الصُّفَّةِ حتى يقولَ الأعرابُ (إنَّ هؤلاءِ مجانينَ) فإذا قضى رسولُ اللهِ صلَّى اللهُ عليهِ وسلَّمَ الصَّلاةَ انصرف إليهم فقال «لو تعلمون ما لكم عنداللهِ عزَّ وجلَّ لأحببتُم لو أنَّكم تزدادون حاجةً وفاقةً»
>
> رواه الترمذي (٢٣٦٨) وابن حبان وصححه الألباني (صحيح الترمذي ٢٣٦٨).
>
> When the Prophet ﷺ used to lead people in prayer, some men would faint during prayer because of their poverty—they were from the people of Suffah—until the Bedouins would say: "These are insane!" So when the Prophet ﷺ would conclude the prayer, he would go to them and say: «If you but knew what Allah has instore for you, you would love that you would be poorer and needier.»
>
> Reported by al-Tirmidhi and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Tirmidhi*, 2368).

This general state of poverty and need that the Companions went through played an important role in purifying their intentions so that they would desire Allah alone and put Him before any other worldly gain. This said, it is also important to note that not all the Companions were poor, and towards the end of the life of the Prophet ﷺ and during the time of the Rightly Guided Caliphs, the Companions acquired more money and became richer. In other words, they did not believe that poverty is a condition or a requirement for living a good Islamic life. When they lacked money, they were patient; and when they had it, they were thankful and generous. In both conditions, they were slaves of Allah who were not enslaved by wealth but used it in what pleases Allah.

> قيل لسفيان الثوري: (أيكون الرجل زاهدا ويكون له المال؟) قال (نعم إذا
> ابتلي صبر وإذا أعطي شكر)
> فصل الخطاب في الزهد والرقائق والآداب (ج١ ص١٢٢).
>
> Sufyan al-Thawri was asked: “Can one be a *zahid* [detached from this world] and yet have money?” He replied: “Yes, if he is patient when afflicted and thankful when blessed.”
>
> *Fasl al-Khitab* (vol. 1, p. 122).

As Imam Ahmad explained, if your heart is detached from this world, money doesn’t impede piety.

> سُئِلَ الإمام أحمد (أيكونُ الإنسانُ ذا مالٍ وهو زاهدٌ؟) قال (نعم إن كان
> لا يفرح بزيادته ولا يحزن بنقصانه)
> (فصل الخطاب في الزهد والرقائق والآداب ج١ ص١٢٤).
>
> Imam Ahmad was asked: “Can one possess *zuhd* and money at the same time?” He said: “Yes, if he is not happy when it increases or sad when it decreases.”
>
> *Fasl al-Khitab* (vol. 1, p. 122).

Poverty was not a condition or state that the Prophet ﷺ asked for, but it was a state that he was patient with and endured. In fact, he used to seek Allah’s protection from it after prayer and in the night and day *adhkar* by saying:

> «اللَّهمَّ إنِّي أعوذُ بك من الكفرِ والفقرِ اللَّهمَّ إنِّي أعوذُ بك من عذابِ
> القبرِ»

رواه النسائي وأبو داود وصححه الألباني (صحيح النسائي ١٣٤٦).

> «O Allah, I seek your refuge from *kufr* [disbelief] and poverty, and I seek your refuge from the punishment of the grave.»
>
> Reported by al-Nasa'i and Abu Dawud and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Nasa'i*, 1346).

To be in poverty is to be in a state where our basic needs are not met, and this could be a distraction and a *fitnah*. So the Prophet ﷺ did not seek it as a preferred state of being. As we shall see in the *Hadith Eleven* in this book, the optimal state of being is *al-Kafaf*, where one is neither poor and in-need nor abundantly rich. And as we shall explain there also, there is no one single state that works for all of us.

Shuh

In the *hadith*, the external happenings of this world are deemed secondary or irrelevant to how we are doing. Worldly wealth cannot help the poor-hearted no matter how much it may be. And the rich-hearted will not be harmed by the fluctuations of this world, whether they be good or bad. The only thing that benefits us or harms us is the state of our heart. The outside world then appears irrelevant.

The Prophet ﷺ identified *shuh* in this rich and poor dichotomy as the thing that harms the soul. *Shuh* can be understood as greed or avarice, and we will discuss this disease in greater detail in the *Hadith Twelve* of this book. Greed and avarice are a sign of weakness in the heart: weakness in what the heart's beliefs, actions, or both. *Shuh* breeds discontent because the greedy heart is always an unhappy heart. *Shuh* leads to humiliation, since the heart that is rabidly obsessed with this world won't mind indignity to attain it. The poverty of the heart leads to greed. And the way to heal the heart is through contentment with Allah and His provisions.

HADITH SEVEN

الحديث السابع

The heart's attachment to this world

قال رسول الله ﷺ : «قَلْبُ الشَّيْخِ شابٌّ عَلى حُبِّ اثْنَتَيْنِ طُولِ الحَياةِ وحُبِّ المالِ»

رواه البخاري (٦٤٢٠) ومسلم (١٠٤٦) واللفظ لمسلم.

The Messenger ﷺ said: «The heart of the old man is young in its love of two things: long life and love of wealth.»

Reported by al-Bukhari (6420) and Muslim (1046).

Commentary

In this *hadith*, the Prophet ﷺ points our attention to the attachment of our hearts as we journey to Allah. When the heart is not cared for, it tends to attach very strongly to the world and refuses to leave it. This is the poor-heart of the last *hadith*, the one that craves the world but can never have enough of it. As we grow older, our wrong attachments only intensify.

Aging

Life has many inconvenient facts, and aging is one of its major ones. We can ignore this fact as along as we are young and healthy—we know it's true but it is so far off in the future that it seems like it will never happen. Other people get old and sick but not me, we think to ourselves. Other people mull over these depressing thoughts but I have my whole life ahead of me, we convince ourselves. I will worry about all this when I am old. This is what we tell ourselves when we are young.

But life sneaks up on us. Before we realize it, we are middle aged. As Ahmad ibn Hanbal said:

> قال أحمد بن حنبل: (ما شَبَّهْتُ الشباب إلا بشيء كان في كُمِّي فسقط)
>
> طبقات الحنابلة (ج١ ص٧٦).
>
> Young age is truly like a thing I had in my pocket and it fell out.
>
> *Tabaqat al-Hanabilah* (vol. 1, p. 76).

The example Imam Ahmad gives points to how quickly youth tends to depart, where often this departure comes as a shock similar to us losing something we've been carrying on us. It is then that the reality of aging and death hits many of us the hardest. We then suddenly contemplate the grim reality of losing all the worldly things we love, we question the meaning of our existence and what has remained of it, and we panic at the prospect of loss and meaninglessness. This is when we experience midlife crises, an anxious reaction that tries to hold on to our lost youth and missed opportunities. The prospect of getting old so terrifies us that we attempt to hide back in the world, in the place that we love the most and which has all that we love.

Reaching midlife in Islam is portrayed differently in the Quran. Allah the Most Wise said:

> حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا بَلَغَ أَشُدَّهُۥ وَبَلَغَ أَرۡبَعِينَ سَنَةٗ قَالَ رَبِّ أَوۡزِعۡنِىٓ
> أَنۡ أَشۡكُرَ نِعۡمَتَكَ ٱلَّتِىٓ أَنۡعَمۡتَ عَلَىَّ وَعَلَىٰ وَٰلِدَىَّ وَأَنۡ أَعۡمَلَ
> صَٰلِحٗا تَرۡضَىٰهُ وَأَصۡلِحۡ لِى فِى ذُرِّيَّتِىٓۖ إِنِّى تُبۡتُ إِلَيۡكَ وَإِنِّى
> مِنَ ٱلۡمُسۡلِمِينَ ١٥
>
> Until when he attains full strength and reaches forty years, he

> says: "My Rabb, grant me the power and ability that I may be grateful for Your favor which You have bestowed upon me and upon my parents, and that I may do righteous deeds that please You, and make my off-spring good. Truly, I have turned to You in repentance, and truly, I am one of the Muslims.
>
> Al-Ahqaf (Q46:15)

Forty is the age when mental acumen and physical strength reach their completion, intertwining to prepare us for the next important phase in our lives; it is when the foolishness of young age is left behind. As such, it is one of the milestones in our lives where we turn with greater dedication and sincerity to Allah, asking him for help and guidance. Abdullah ibn Dawud said about the pious predecessors:

> قال عبد الله بن داود: (كان أحدهم إذا بلغ أربعين سنة طوى فراشه)
> المجالسة وجواهر العلم (ج١ ص٤٤٤-٤٤٥).

> When one of them would reach the age of forty, they would fold their mattress.
>
> *Al-Mujalasah wa Jawahir al-Ilm* (vol. 1, pp. 444–45).

They recognized how pivotal this time was and responded with spending more of their time at night in the worship of Allah rather than sleep, preparing to meet Him. It is noteworthy that it was at this age that Prophet Muhammad ﷺ received his first revelation and became a prophet. It is also said that all or most prophets became prophets of Allah when they were forty. It is very telling that the Prophets of Allah would receive this momentous task of personal and communal change when they had reached forty. At this age, as the *ayah* explains, the Muslim notes the favors of Allah on him, prays to Allah to preserve these blessings and to grant him more, and looks more intently to the next life. This anticipation of the Hereafter keeps the Muslim focused on his future and the monumental changes lying ahead, rather than panicking and lamenting the past. A midlife crisis sets in because of our strong attachment to this world and our fear of losing it. The remedy for such crises is to start changing our priorities and focus.

We also dread old age because of our interpretation of this state, the place we have assigned to aging and the elderly in our social consciousness. The way we in western cultures, or at least pockets of it, view and treat the elderly is deplorable. We ridicule them! Comedians make fun of them: fading looks, diminished abilities, mental confusion, and so on. Aging and the elderly become a sad and tired stereotype that no one wants for themselves. We treat the old as rambling fools who are outdated and irrelevant. We view them as a burden and actually banish them into retirement homes, secluded from family and society. The old in Islam, on the other hand, occupy an entirely different space. The Prophet ﷺ commanded us to honor and respect elders.

> جاءَ شيخٌ يُريدُ النَّبيَّ صلَّى اللَّهُ عليهِ وسلَّمَ فأَبطأَ القومُ أن يوسِّعوا لَه فقالَ:
>
> «ليسَ مِنَّا من لم يرحَمْ صغيرَنا ولم يوقِّرْ كبيرَنا»
>
> رواه الترمذي وصححه الألباني (صحيح الترمذي ١٩١٩).
>
> An old man came to see the Prophet ﷺ and the people were slow to give him space, so he said: «The one who is not merciful with our young and not respectful of our elders is not one of us.»
>
> Reported by al-Tirmidhi and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Tirmidhi*, 1919).

The elderly are also a source of blessing with their *du'a*, wisdom, and experience.

> «البركة مع أكابركم»
>
> رواه ابن حبان وصححه الألباني (السلسلة الصحيحة ١٧٧٨).
>
> «*Barakah* is with your elders.»

Reported by Ibn Hibban and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*al-Silsilah al-Sahihah*, 1778).

Rather than the ridicule we heap on the old, we should honor aging as a time of wisdom, deeper understanding of life, and stronger relationship with Allah. It is a very important transitioning time that brings us closer to Allah. When we think about it under this light, why would we hate or dread it so much?

The *hadith* lets us know that heart and body follow different trajectories in the aging process. The body could be old but the heart is still young, or the body could be young but its heart is very old. What we are capable of doing does not only depend on the state of our body: the vitality of our hearts plays the decisive role. This vitality is fueled by the hope we have in our hearts.

Hope

Hope for permanence is behind all of our other hopes and desires. Think about all of your wishes, and you will find that they ultimately go back to this one desire. This is humanity's hope since the time of Adam عَلَيۡهِ ٱلسَّلَامُ. When Shaytan wanted to tempt Adam and convince him to eat from the Forbidden Tree, he deceived him by claiming that the tree will grant him immortality in Heaven. Allah informs us that Shaytan said to Adam:

ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنُ قَالَ يَٰٓـَٔادَمُ هَلۡ أَدُلُّكَ عَلَىٰ شَجَرَةِ ٱلۡخُلۡدِ وَمُلۡكٖ لَّا يَبۡلَىٰ ﴿١٢٠﴾

Then Shaytan whispered to him and said: "O Adam, shall I direct you to the tree of eternity and possession that will not perish?"
Taha (Q20:120)

The shaytan understood Adam's desire very well and tempted him from where he was weakest and most vulnerable. Adam was looking for immortality in Heaven, and we have the same desire. But, according to the *hadith*, many of us direct this desire to the world instead of Heaven:

all that we should wish for in the Hereafter is replaced by the luxuries of this worldly life.

Allah had made this world very desirable and attractive. Allah says:

زُيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ حُبُّ ٱلشَّهَوَٰتِ

The love of what people desire has been made beautiful for them.
Al-Imran (Q3:14)

This is part of the test that Allah put us on this earth to prevail against: the struggle in our hearts between loving Allah and the temporary distractions of this world.

إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا مَا عَلَى ٱلْأَرْضِ زِينَةً لَّهَا لِنَبْلُوَهُمْ أَيُّهُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا

We have made what's on this earth an adornment for it to test
them who among them does the best of deeds.
Al-Kahf (Q18:7)

And between the two, Allah tells is that it is His promise that is true, not the delusions of this life.

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ إِنَّ وَعْدَ ٱللَّهِ حَقٌّ ۖ فَلَا تَغُرَّنَّكُمُ ٱلْحَيَوٰةُ ٱلدُّنْيَا
وَلَا يَغُرَّنَّكُم بِٱللَّهِ ٱلْغَرُورُ ٥

O people, the promise of Allah is true. So don't let the worldly life
deceive you and do not let the Deceiver deceive you about Allah.
Fatir (Q35:5)

Shaytan speaks to our hearts and makes promises about what will make us happy. It is ironic that it was Shaytan's advice that deprived Adam from stay in Paradise, the very thing that he was promising Adam. Similarly, Shaytan's whispers for us to cling ever more strongly to this world is the very thing that will deprive us from happiness and immortality in Heaven. We have to learn from the lesson of our father, Adam عَلَيْهِ ٱلسَّلَامُ and distance ourselves from the whispers of Shaytan and his path.

The most intense attachments in this life come from hearts that do not have the love of Allah in them: the diseased heart, the deceased heart, and the poor heart. Allah says describing the state of some of the non-believers:

وَلَتَجِدَنَّهُمْ أَحْرَصَ ٱلنَّاسِ عَلَىٰ حَيَوٰةٍ وَمِنَ ٱلَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا۟ ۚ يَوَدُّ
أَحَدُهُمْ لَوْ يُعَمَّرُ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ وَمَا هُوَ بِمُزَحْزِحِهِۦ مِنَ
ٱلْعَذَابِ أَن يُعَمَّرَ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ بَصِيرٌۢ بِمَا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٩٦﴾

> And you will find them to be the most eager of people to keep on living, even more so than the polytheists. One of them would desire to live for a thousand years, and it is not going to save him from punishment if he were to last this long. And Allah sees what they do.
>
> al-Baqarah (Q2:96)

When we deposit all of our time, love, and identity into this world, there will be little reason to desire anything else beyond it. It would be like one who beautified a house the best he can, though this house is not his, and found it painful to leave when it was time. How could he go back to his real home, the Hereafter in this case, when he had spent little or no time taking care of it? No one wants to leave a beautiful dwelling for the sake of a ruin. So we hold on to this false hope that we could stay in this world forever and it distracts us until the inevitable end suddenly descends. Allah says:

ذَرْهُمْ يَأْكُلُوا۟ وَيَتَمَتَّعُوا۟ وَيُلْهِهِمُ ٱلْأَمَلُ ۖ فَسَوْفَ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣﴾

> Leave them to eat and enjoy and let them be preoccupied with (false) hope. They will come to know.
>
> Al-Hijr (Q15:3)

If we don't want to be like them, we must not allow false hope to distract us. The wise keep their expectations of this world to a minimum and their hope in a long life in check. Believing that we will live for a long time brings with it heedlessness of Allah's reminders, neglect of what benefits us in the hereafter, and stiffness of the heart.

> قال محمد بن أبي توبة: (أقام معروف الصلاة ثم قال لي تقدم تقدم فقال محمد إني إن صليت بكم هذه الصلاة لم أصل بكم غيرها فقال له معروف وأنت تحدث نفسك أن تصلي صلاة أخرى نعوذ بالله من طول الأمل فإنه يضيع خير العمل)
>
> الترغيب والترهيب لقوام السنة (ج١ ص١٤٧).
>
> Muhammad ibn Abi Tawbah said: Ma'ruf called the *iqamah* of the prayer and said to me: "Go ahead, go ahead." So Muhammad said: "If I were to lead in this prayer, I won't lead in another." So Ma'ruf said to him: "And you are telling yourself that you will live to pray another prayer! We seek Allah's protection from having hope in a long life, for it prevents from performing the best of deeds."
>
> *Al-Targhib wa al-Tarhib* by Qawwam al-Sunnah (vol. 1, p. 147).

It is reported that Ali ibn Abi Talib said:

> قال علي ابن أبي طالب: (إِنَّ أَخْوَفَ مَا أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمُ اثْنَتَيْنِ طُولُ الْأَمَلِ وَاتِّبَاعُ الْهَوَى فَأَمَّا طُولُ الْأَمَلِ فَيُنْسِي الْآخِرَةَ وَأَمَّا اتِّبَاعُ الْهَوَى فَيَصُدُّ عَنِ الْحَقِّ)
>
> الزهد لأحمد بن حنبل (ص ١٠٧).
>
> What I fear the most for you are two things: hope in a long life and following *hawa* [desire]. As for hope in a long life, it makes you forget about of the Hereafter. And as for following *hawa*, it blocks you from following the truth.

Al-Zuhd by Ahmad ibn Hanbal (p. 107).

When we expect to die soon, we will listen carefully to the words of Allah and follow his commands closely, all with an open and living heart that expects to meet Allah shortly. We will perfect our worship the best we can because we may not get another opportunity to do so.

> كان ابنُ عُمرَ يقولُ: (إذاأمسيْتَ فلا تنتَظِرِ الصباحَ وإذا أصبحْتَ فلا تنتظِرِ المساءَ وخُذْ من صحتِك لمرضِك ومن حياتِك لموتِك)
>
> البخاري (٦٤١٦).
>
> Ibn Umar used to say: "In the evening, do not wait for the morning. And in the morning, do not wait for the evening. Take advantage of your health before you are sick, and of your life before you die."
>
> Al-Bukhari (6416).

This means that we will be better Muslims and better human beings when we can look at each day as our last day. We live the best when we are cognizant of our death. This state moves us to a more sincere worship of Allah. It will enable us to truly live as we fill each day with the best words and actions we wish to meet Allah with. There will be no magical point in the future when we will change and finally become the people we want to be; that moment is now. It will help us get ready for death and what lies beyond.

We can mitigate our propensity for extended hope by remembering that our hopes extend way beyond our actual life.

> خَطَّ النبيُّ صلَّى اللهُ عليه وسلم خَطًّا مُرَبَّعًا وخَطَّ خَطًّا في الوَسَطِ خارِجًا منهُ وخَطَّ خُطَطًا صِغارًا إلى هذا الذي في الوَسَطِ مِن جانِبِهِ الذي في الوَسَطِ وقال: «هذا الإنْسانُ وهذا أَجَلُهُ مُحيطٌ بهِ أو قَدْ أحاطَ بِهِ وهذا الذي هو خارِجٌ أَمَلُهُ وهذِهِ الخُطَطُ الصِّغارُ الأَعْراضُ فإنْ أَخْطَأَهُ هذا

> نَهَشَهُ هذا وإنْ أخْطَأَهُ هذا نَهَشَهُ هذا»
>
> رواه البخاري (٦٤١٧).
>
> The Prophet ﷺ drew a square and drew inside it a line that jutted out of it and drew shorter lines to the line in the middle of the square and said: «This is the human, and this is his death surrounding him. And the line projecting out is his hope, and these small lines are the tests and afflictions: if this misses him the other bites him, and if this misses him the other bites him.»
>
> Reported by al-Bukhari (6417).

If this is how our worldly hopes betray us, we should moderate them by transferring our hopes and dreams to the Hereafter. It is there that all the wealth and beauty we so desire truly lives, and that should be the focus of our intentions and deeds. If we work for the sake of the Hereafter, Allah will give us the rewards and blessings of this world and the next together.

Love of the world

The *hadith* in this chapter instructs us to limit our love for this world and our expectations of it. Of course, not all hope is bad. Our ability to hope is our ability to see beyond what lies right in front of us. It is our ability to imagine something better and to strive for it. Without it, we would accomplish little in this world. And it is hope for something greater and bigger that fuels our journey to the Hereafter. Hope is there to propel us to Heaven, our one true eternal dwelling. When we cheapen this hope into an attachment to this world, we miss the whole point of hope. Our quest for the sublime eternal degrades into one for the inferior and perishable. Love for this life then becomes very intense in our hearts. As the *hadith* explains, our hearts as we age continue to be attached to life and wealth. For many of us, the love for these two does not diminish with age but in fact, as another narration explains, they grow stronger.

«يَكْبَرُ ابنُ آدمَ ويَكْبَرُ معهُ اثْنانِ حُبُّ المالِ وطولُ العُمُر»

رواه البخاري (٦٤٢١).

> «The child of Adam grows old and two things grow bigger with him: love of money and long life.»
>
> Reported by al-Bukhari (6421).

Even as we advance in age, we do not relent in our love for this world. This is so because we have nurtured these loves our entire lives, so how do we expect them to suddenly wane? It is when we get closer to death that we hold on most firmly to the little life that has remained. If anything, this teaches us not to delay our repentance to old age because it may be hardest for us to change then.

We can prevail against the intense love of this life by countering it with loving Allah, recalling the inevitable certainty of death, and remembering that true living is the one in the Hereafter.

وَمَا هَٰذِهِ ٱلۡحَيَوٰةُ ٱلدُّنۡيَآ إِلَّا لَهۡوٞ وَلَعِبٞۚ وَإِنَّ ٱلدَّارَ ٱلۡأٓخِرَةَ لَهِيَ
ٱلۡحَيَوَانُۚ لَوۡ كَانُواْ يَعۡلَمُونَ ٦٤

And this worldly life is only amusement and play, and it is
the next life that is true life if they but know.
Al-Ankabut (Q29:64)

This belief has to be firmly planted in our hearts, and we must remind ourselves of it by reading the Quran, *hadith*, and stories of the pious predecessors. We should then move to apply the lessons we learn by detaching from the excesses of this world and being satisfied with a minimum that meets our needs. As our expectations of this world decline, we would be able to better prepare for the life to come. Lust for this world is fueled by hope for a lengthy life. Sufyan al-Thawri said:

> قال سفيان الثوري: (الزهد قصر الأمل)
>
> المجالسة وجواهر العلم (ج٦ ص٤١٩).
>
> *Zuhd* [detachment from this world] is having short hope.
>
> *Al-Mujalasah wa Jawahir al-Ilm* (vol. 6, p. 419).

If we truly love ourselves, we would love for it what benefits it. And what benefits it is a great hope in the Hereafter and a small one in this life.

Short hope and long-term planning

It may seem that abdicating hope for a long life conflicts with having long-term goals and planning for something of value in this life, which typically takes time to achieve. But this is not the case. Any type of plan we make can be cut short by our death, and this is a reality that we cannot escape and should not try to run away from. Contemplating the reality of our death, coupled with the desire to receive maximum rewards from Allah, propels us to do our best while we are alive to complete our plans. And we also know that our goals, if they were for Allah, will bring us great rewards whether we stay alive to witness their realization or die before that. So planning long-term and starting great projects does not and should not be curtailed by the remembrance of death but rather enhanced by it. Our plain of expectations is not limited to the time we spend on this earth but extends to the next life. Consider what the Prophet ﷺ said here:

> «إن قامتِ الساعةُ وفي يدِ أحدِكم فسيلةٌ فإن استطاعَ أن لا تقومَ حتى يغرِسَها فليغرِسْها»
>
> رواه أحمد وصححه الألباني (السلسلة الصحيحة ٩).

> «If the Hour starts and one of you has a small plant in his hand and he can still plant it, let him do so.»
>
> Reported by Ahmad and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Al-Silsilah al-Sahihah*, 9).

As long as there is a window for doing good things on this earth, we should take advantage of it. And one important way of doing that is to develop and start great projects for the sake of Allah. Then, even if we die before their completion, we will receive the reward of the projects we planned and pursued. This is how our heart continues to stay young and productive, attached to the pleasure of Allah. This is why some people start their Quran memorization when they are sixty or older and actually finish memorizing the whole Quran. But even if they don't, it is better that we possess such a living and hopeful heart that desires to meet Allah with all the good deeds it can bring.

HADITH EIGHT

الحديث الثامن

The world and the heart

خرَجَ عَلَيْنا رسول الله ﷺ ونَحْنُ نَذْكُرُ الفَقْرَ ونَتَخَوَّفُهُ فقال: «آلفَقْرَ تَخافونَ؟ وَالَّذِي نَفْسِي بِيَدِهِ لَتُصَبَّنَّ عَلَيْكُمْ الدُّنْيا صَبًّا حَتَّى لا يُزِيغَ قَلْبَ أَحَدِكُمْ إِزاغَةً إِلَّا هِيَهْ وَأَيْمُ اللهِ لَقَدْ تَرَكْتُكُمْ عَلى مِثْلِ البَيْضاءِ لَيْلُها ونَهارُها سَواءٌ»

رواه ابن ماجه وحسنه الألباني (صحيح ابن ماجه ٥).

The Messenger ﷺ came out while we were talking about poverty and expressing fears about it and he said: «Is it poverty that you fear? I swear by the One who has my soul in His Hand [the bounties of] this world will be poured upon on so much that the heart of one of you would not go astray except because of it. I swear by Allah, I have left you on the likeness of the white [path]: its night is no different than its day.»

Reported by Ibn Majah (5) and declared *hasan* by al-Albani (*Sahih ibn Majah*, 5).

Commentary

In the *Hadith Six*, we saw that what defines true poverty and affluence is not material possessions but the well-being of our hearts. In the *Hadith Seven*, we learned about the intense desire our hearts have for this world. And in this *hadith*, we realize the damaging effect of this intense love on our hearts and how it can move us to abandon the truth.

Fear of poverty

The *hadith* opens with some of the Companions sharing their fears of poverty. This is a common human reaction to the possibility, or reality, of unsatisfied basic needs. Poverty is something we all worry about. Shaytan, knowing well this human frailty, capitalizes on it to shake our *iman* and inject doubt into our hearts. Allah said:

ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنُ يَعِدُكُمُ ٱلۡفَقۡرَ وَيَأۡمُرُكُم بِٱلۡفَحۡشَآءِۖ وَٱللَّهُ
يَعِدُكُم مَّغۡفِرَةٗ مِّنۡهُ وَفَضۡلٗاۗ وَٱللَّهُ وَٰسِعٌ عَلِيمٞ

> The devil threatens you with poverty and commands you to commit sin. But Allah promises you forgiveness from Him and bounties. And Allah is all-Encompassing and Knowing.
> Al-Baqarah (Q2:268)

Using our fears against us, fear of poverty chief among them, is one of the common weapons of Shaytan. He uses it to incite us to veer from Allah's path by shaking our trust in His generosity and wisdom. He whispers that our material troubles will have no end and that they reflect Allah's neglect or His hatred. He tells us we deserve more and that Allah did not give us what we are owed. He moves us to violate Allah's commands to attain financial security, and we listen to him. Commenting on the *ayah*, the Messenger ﷺ said:

«إنَّ للشيطانِ لَمَّةً بابنِ آدمَ وللمَلَكِ لَمَّةً فأما لَمَّةُ الشيطانِ فإيعادٌ بالشرِّ وتكذيبٌ بالحقِّ وأما لَمَّةُ المَلَكِ فإيعادٌ بالخيرِ وتصديقٌ بالحقِّ فمَن وجد ذلك فلْيَعْلَمْ أنه من اللهِ فلْيَحْمَدِ اللهَ ومَن وجد الأخرى فلْيَتَعَوَّذْ باللهِ من الشيطانِ ثم قرأ ﴿الشَّيْطَانُ يَعِدُكُمُ الْفَقْرَ وَيَأْمُرُكُمْ بِالْفَحْشَاءِ وَاللَّهُ يَعِدُكُمْ مَغْفِرَةً مِنْهُ وَفَضْلًا﴾ [البقرة ٢٦٨]»

رواه الترمذي (٢٩٨٨) وصححه الألباني في صحيح الترمذي (٢٩٨٨).

> «Shaytan has a connection to and influence on the child of Adam and the angel has a connection and influence. The connection and influence of Shaytan is the promise of evil [to come] and the denial of the truth. And the connection and influence of the angel is the promise of good [things to come] and the acceptance of the truth. So, whoever finds this, let them thank and praise Allah, and whoever finds the other one let them seek Allah's protection from Shaytan. Then the Prophet ﷺ read [the *ayah* from the Quran]: ﴿Shaytan promises you poverty and commands you to commit indecency, and Allah promises you forgiveness and bounties from Him﴾ [al-Baqarah: 268].»
>
> Reported by al-Tirmidhi (2988) and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Tirmidhi*, 2988).

When these thoughts enter our minds and disturb our hearts, we have to quickly recognize their source and seek Allah's protection from Shaytan. We have to remind ourselves of Allah's promise that sustenance is preserved for every living being. Allah the Most Merciful says:

وَمَا مِن دَآبَّةٍ فِي ٱلْأَرْضِ إِلَّا عَلَى ٱللَّهِ رِزْقُهَا وَيَعْلَمُ

There is no creature on earth except
that its provision is guaranteed by Allah.
Hud (Q11:6)

As Allah's knowledge and mercy encompass everything and all living beings, so does His provision cover the needs of all of His creation. Though we need to work to earn our living, our efforts are only the means that unlock the provision which Allah had destined for us. Chasing after wealth and worrying about it does not secure more of it. We should frequently remind ourselves that what Allah has destined is what we will get, no more and no less. One of the most neglected means of securing and blessing our provisions, as we shall see in the

Hadith Thirty in this book, is to make the Hereafter and Allah's pleasure our main concerns. When we take care of what Allah wants from us, Allah will take care of what we want from Him.

The poverty that the Companions feared, and suffered through, was at a level that many of us today can only read about and imagine: struggling to find the next meal, going hungry for days, owning a single garment, and living in humble mud dwellings or at the back of the mosque. This level of need lives on in the world today, where Muslim countries are among the hardest hit. It is natural then for those enduring these conditions to worry about what lies next and how they can escape their difficulties. Despite this hardship, the Prophet ﷺ explained that it is not poverty that poses the greatest risk but wealth. Though poverty could prove to be very challenging and offers its share of temptations, affluence and wealth bring the greatest challenge and temptation to our *iman* and our hearts.

The temptation of wealth

The Prophet ﷺ explained that it is not poverty that they should be worried about. He predicted that their poverty will be temporary; it will be replaced by this world opening itself to them. And herein comes the real test. The Prophet ﷺ said:

> «الفقرَ تخافونَ أو العَوَزَ أم تهمُّكُم الدُّنيا فإنَّ اللهَ فاتحٌ عليكُم فارسَ والرُّومَ وتُصَبُّ عليكُم الدُّنيا صبًّا حتَّى لا يُزِيغَكم بعدي إن أزاغَكم إلَّا هيَ»
>
> رواه الطبراني وصححه الألباني (صحيح الترغيب ٣٢٥٧).
>
> «Is it poverty or need that you fear or are you worried about the world? Indeed, Allah will open for you Persia and Byzantium and the world will pour upon you so much that nothing after me would misguide you, if you get misguided, but it.»
>
> Reported by al-Tabarani and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Tar-*

ghib, 3257).

The world will come to you, he was telling them, and it did. And with the new territory that the Muslims acquired, greater wealth came into Muslim hands. And the Prophet ﷺ noted in another *hadith* that this future state of wealth is not better than the needy state they were in. He ﷺ said:

> «أنتُم اليومَ خيرٌ أمْ إذا غُدِيَ على أحدِكُم بِجَفْنةٍ مِنْ خُبزٍ ولَحْم وريحَ عليهِ بأُخْرى وغَدا في حُلةٍ وراحَ في أُخْرى وسَترتُمْ بيوتَكُمْ كما تُسْتَرُ الكَعْبَةُ؟» قلنا (بَلْ نحنُ يومَئِذٍ خيرٌ نتفرغ للعبادة) فقالَ «بَلْ أنتُم اليومَ خيرٌ»
>
> رواه الترمذي وحسنه وصححه الألباني في صحيح الترغيب (٢١٤٢).
>
> «Are you better today or on the day when you will receive a plate of bread and meat in the morning and another in the afternoon, and wear a suite in the morning and another in the afternoon, and you drape your homes like the Ka‘bah?» They said: "We will be better then because we will be free for worship." He said: «Nay, you are better today.»
>
> Reported by al-Tirmidhi (2142) who graded it *hasan* and al-Albani graded it *sahih* (*Sahih al-Tirmidhi*, 2142).

The Companions' response reflects how many of us think today: the more money we have, the more good we can do. And for some, this may be true. But for most, as the Prophet ﷺ explained, the opposite happens. Rather than giving more time and money to Allah when we are richer, we are distracted and consumed by our wealth. The worldly pleasures that we crave carry with them the potential of altering our hearts. Our love and attachment for the world increases as we have more of it, and we start to pursue it with greater passion. As our wealth makes greater demands on our time, we become more competitive, envious, and arrogant. As our wealth devours more and more of our life, we fail to be thankful or close to Allah, and our hearts harden. This is why the Prophet ﷺ explained that the glitter of this world will be the greatest source of temptation, nothing turning people away from Allah more than it. In another *hadith*, the Prophet ﷺ said:

«إِنَّ لِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ فِتْنَةٌ وَفِتْنَةُ أُمَّتِي الْمالُ»

رواه الترمذي وابن حبان والطبراني وصححه الألباني (صحيح الترمذي ٢٣٣٦).

> «Every people will have a source of temptation and the source of temptation for my people is money.»
>
> Reported by al-Tirmidhi (2336), Ibn Hibban, and al-Tabarani and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Tirmidhi*, 2336).

There are other *fitnah*s that we have to contend with in our lives, but the *fitnah* of wealth is the greatest and fiercest. This is why the Prophet ﷺ urged his Ummah and recommended it to be content with what satisfies its needs from this world and not to indulge in it. He ﷺ knew the damaging effects of wealth. He ﷺ said:

«اطَّلَعْتُ في الجنَّةِ فرأيتُ أكثرَ أهلِها الفُقراءَ»

رواه البخاري (٦٤٤٩)

> «I looked into Heaven and found that most of its inhabitants were the poor.»
>
> Reported by al-Bukhari (6449).

Poverty is also a *fitnah*. But it is easier for the human heart to be patient when we are poor than to be grateful when we are rich. We know that most of the followers of the Prophets of Allah, including Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, were the poor and weak, the minority and marginalized of their societies. We know that the ones who stood in the face of the Prophets and opposed their *da'wah* were the rich and elite: Pharaoh, Haman, Qarun, Abu Jahl, and Abu Lahab. Wealth is not the issue but how we react to it. Wealth tempts us because we allow it to:

we do not possess the hearts that can deal with it. And even when our hearts are strong, wealth does delay entry to Heaven.

> «يدخُلُ الفقراءُ الجنَّةَ قبلَ الأغنياءِ بخَمسِمائةِ عامٍ نِصفِ يومٍ»
>
> رواه الترمذي وقال حسن صحيح وصححه الألباني (صحيح الترمذي ٢٣٥٣).
>
> «The poor will enter Heaven five hundred years, equivalent to half a day, before the rich do.»
>
> Reported by al-Tirmidhi (2353) who graded it *hasan sahih* and al-Albani graded it *sahih* (*Sahih al-Tirmidhi*, 2353).

For the few years of poverty that they spent on this earth, the poor will enjoy Heaven for five hundred years before the rich do. The rich will be questioned about their wealth: its source and expenditure, and the one who has more will be questioned more. Money brings with it power and ability for greater sin. Because of its temptation and distraction, it becomes a burden in this life and the next. Mujahid رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُ explained:

> قال مجاهد رحمه الله: (يؤتى بثلاثة نفر يوم القيامة بالغني وبالمريض والعبد فيقول للغني «ما منعك عن عبادتي؟» فيقول ((أكثرت لي من المال فطغيت)) فيؤتى بسليمان بن داود عليه السلام في ملكه فيقال له «أنت كنت أشد شغلاً أم هذا؟» قال ((بل هذا)) قال «فإن هذا لم يمنعه شغله عن عبادتي» قال فيؤتى بالمريض فيقول «ما منعك عن عبادتي؟» قال ((يا رب أشغلت علي جسدي)) قال فيؤتى بأيوب عليه السلام في ضره فيقول له «أنت كنت أشد ضراً أم هذا؟» قال فيقول ((لا بل هذا)) قال «فإن هذا لم يمنعه ذلك أن عبدني» قال ثم يؤتى بالمملوك فيقال له «ما منعك عن عبادتي؟» فيقول ((جعلت علي أرباباً يملكونني)) قال فيؤتى بيوسف الصديق عليه السلام في عبوديته فيقال

> «أنت أشد عبودية أم هذا؟» قال «لا بل هذا» قال «فإن هذا لم يشغله شيء عن عبادتي»
>
> تهذيب حلية الأولياء لصالح الشامي (ج٢ ص١٢).
>
> Three people will be brought [before Allah] on the Day of Judgment: a sick person, a rich person, and a slave. And Allah will say to the rich one: «What stopped you from worshiping me?» And he will say: "You gave me too much money and so I rebelled." And then Solomon Son of David عَلَيْهِ ٱلسَّلَامُ will be presented in his kingship and the rich man will be asked: «Were you busier or he?» And he will say: "No, he." And Allah will say: «But his responsibilities didn't stop him from worshiping me.» And then the sick person will be brought and will be asked: «What stopped you from worshiping me?» And he will say: "O Rabb, you busied my body [with illness]." And then Job عَلَيْهِ ٱلسَّلَامُ will be presented in his hardship and the sick man will be asked: «Was your sickness greater or his?» And he will say: "No, his." And Allah will say: «But his [condition] didn't stop him from worshiping me.» And then the slave will be brought and will be asked: «What stopped you from worshiping me?» And he will say: "You put over me lords who owned me." And then Joseph عَلَيْهِ ٱلسَّلَامُ will be presented in his state of slavery and the slave will be asked: «Was your slavery more difficult or his?» And he will say: "No, his." And Allah will say: «But nothing stopped him from worshiping me.»
>
> *Tahdhib Hilyat al-Awliya'* (vol. 2, p. 12).

We all have demands on our time, and all of us can come up with excuses for why we aren't doing what we are supposed to, why we are not yet who we are supposed to be. There is an endless supply of excuses to explain why we are not close to Allah. But as the examples in Mujahid's story prove, none of us is as busy as the Prophets of Allah were. In fact, there is no good excuse. Yes they were Prophets but Allah also set them up as role models for us to follow. There is no trial in this world except that the Prophets of Allah had gone through the worst of it and prevailed. Allah does not demand from us the same level of devotion as the prophets but He does ask us to stay on the straight path and to be close to Him no matter what life brings our way. Pursuit of wealth can devour our entire life, and because of that the rich man pleaded that he had no time. This is why it is best that we limit ourselves to what we truly need from this life and spend the rest of our time in nobler and more worthy pursuits.

The white path

Much of the rejection of the truth and deviation from it come not from the ambiguity of the truth itself. As the Prophet ﷺ explained, Islam has been outlined and explained so well that it resembles a well-lit path that no one can miss. Such a path does not suffer from obscurity. When we deviate from this clear path, we do so because we know the truth but prefer the world over it. Allah says:

وَٱتۡلُ عَلَيۡهِمۡ نَبَأَ ٱلَّذِيٓ ءَاتَيۡنَٰهُ ءَايَٰتِنَا فَٱنسَلَخَ
مِنۡهَا فَأَتۡبَعَهُ ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنُ فَكَانَ مِنَ ٱلۡغَاوِينَ ١٧٥ وَلَوۡ شِئۡنَا
لَرَفَعۡنَٰهُ بِهَا وَلَٰكِنَّهُۥٓ أَخۡلَدَ إِلَى ٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَٱتَّبَعَ هَوَىٰهُۚ فَمَثَلُهُۥ
كَمَثَلِ ٱلۡكَلۡبِ إِن تَحۡمِلۡ عَلَيۡهِ يَلۡهَثۡ أَوۡ تَتۡرُكۡهُ
يَلۡهَثۚ ذَّٰلِكَ مَثَلُ ٱلۡقَوۡمِ ٱلَّذِينَ كَذَّبُواْ بِـَٔايَٰتِنَاۚ فَٱقۡصُصِ
ٱلۡقَصَصَ لَعَلَّهُمۡ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ ١٧٦

> And recite to them the news of him to whom we gave [knowledge of] Our signs, but he sloughed them off, and so Shaytan possessed him, and he became of the deviators. And if

> We had willed, We could have elevated him by it, but he clung to the earth and followed his own desire. So his example is like that of the dog: if you chase him, he pants, or if you leave him, he pants. That is the example of the people who denied Our signs. So tell the stories, for perhaps they will think.
>
> Al-A‘raf (Q7:175–176)

This is a man who knew what the truth was. According to commentaries of the Quran, it may refer to Balaam son of Beor, Ummayah ibn Abi al-Salt, or one of the People of the Book. They all are presented as examples who knew the truth well but decided—for the sake of wealth, glory, or out of envy—to reject it. And this process of rejection is described as an act of removing one's skin, sloughing off the truth as if nothing remains of it. And the motivation? Love of the world. And Allah describes him as a panting dog in his love for the world and attitude about the truth: he is always panting after the world whether the truth is available or not.

Love of the world may also lead us to change the truth that we have for the sake of fame, praise, recognition, or more wealth. As Mu‘adh ibn Jabal رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُ insightfully explains:

> قال معاذ بن جبل رضي الله عنه: (إنَّ مِن ورائكم فتناً يَكْثُرُ فيها المال
> ويُفتَحُ فيه القرآن حتى يأْخذه المؤمن والمنافق والرجل والمرأة والصغير
> والكبير والعبد والحر فيوشِكُ قائلٌ أن يقول ما للناس لا يتَّبِعوني وقد
> قرأْتُ القرآن ما هم بِمُتَّبِعِيَّ حتى أبتدعَ لهم غيرَهُ فإياكم وما ابتُدِعَ فإنَّ
> ما ابتُدِعَ ضلالةٌ وأُحذِّرُكم زَيْغَةَ الحكيم فإنَّ الشيطان قد يقولُ كلمةَ
> الضلالة على لسان الحكيم وقد يقول المنافق كلمةَ الحق قال الراوي
> قلت لمعاذٍ وما يدريني يرحمك الله أنَّ الحكيمَ قد يقول كلمة الضلالة
> وأنَّ المنافقَ قد يقول كلمة الحق قال بلى اجتنب من كلام الحكيم

المُشْتَهِراتِ التي يقال فيها ما هذه ولا يُثْنِيَنَّك ذلك عنه فإنَّه لعله أن يُراجِعَ وتلقَّ الحقَّ إذا سمعته فإنَّ على الحق نوراً)

رواه أبو داود (٤٦١١) وصححه الألباني (صحيح أبي داود ٤٦١١)

> "Ahead of you lie *fitan* [tempting times] where money will be abundant and the Quran available to all, so that believer and hypocrite, man and woman, young and old, free and slave will read it. And one is about to say: 'How is it that people are not following me and I know the Quran! They will not follow me until I innovate for them something else.' So beware of what is innovated, for what is innovated is misguidance. And I warn you about the mistake of the wise, for Shaytan could sneak misguidance onto the tongue of the wise, and the hypocrite could speak the truth." So I asked Mu'adh: "And how would I know, may Allah have mercy on you, that the wise has spoken misguidance or that the hypocrite has said the truth?" He said: "Yes, avoid the infamous sayings of the wise, the ones that are received with 'What is this?' And do not give up on him, for he may change. And adopt the truth when you hear it, for the truth has a light that shines through."
>
> Reported by Abu Dawud (4611) and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih Abu Dawud*, 4611).

The motivation for religious innovation here is the desire for more followers. Think about all the things people do today for attention and fame: being edgy, pushing the envelope, being provocative to keep the attention on them. If I read and learn the Quran but find that no one is paying attention to me, then I need to stand out. And what better way to stand out than to be controversial or say what no one else is saying? So the religion of Islam is changed because the love for the world dictates it.

We can also miss the clear path of Islam when we don’t follow it properly and start charting our own supposedly superior path. It is there where the disease of arrogance, and other heart diseases, lead to ruinous results. The Prophet ﷺ said:

> «إنَّ أخوفَ ما أخافُ عليكم رجلٌ قرأ القرآنَ حتّى إذا رُئِيَتْ بَهْجَتُهُ عليه
> وكان رِدْءاً للإسلام انسلخ منه ونبذه وراء ظهره وسعى على جاره بالسيف
> ورماه بالشرك» قلت (يا نبيَّ الله أيُّهما أولى بالشرك الرامي أو المَرْمِيُّ؟)
> قال «بل الرامي»
>
> أخرجه البخاري في التاريخ وأبو يعلى في المسند وحسنه الألباني (السلسلة الصحيحة ٣٢٠١).

> «What I fear most for you is a man who read the Quran and when the Quran’s beauty is seen on him and he becomes a champion of Islam, he casts it off and puts it behind his back and attacks his neighbor with the sword and accuses him of apostasy.» I said: “O Messenger of Allah, who is more worthy of apostasy? The accused or the accuser?” He replied: «The accuser.»
>
> Reported by al-Bukhari in *al-Tarikh* and Abu Ya‘la in the *Musnad* and declared *hasan* by al-Albani (*al-Silsilah al-Sahihah*, 3201).

It is both sad and alarming when this happens. Someone could be so close to the truth, and actually be considered as one of its allies and defenders, and yet end up destroying all that he had built. Truly, it is Allah who can protect our hearts and we ask Him to preserve ours. The heart in this instance must not have been completely cleansed of it diseases. It is impossible for this to happen to a sincere and humble heart, one that has truly submitted to its Creator. This will happen only when the submission is incomplete and seriously flawed.

When the heart rejects the truth, it may lose its ability to recognize it afterwards. Allah said:

وَنُقَلِّبُ أَفْـِٔدَتَهُمْ وَأَبْصَـٰرَهُمْ كَمَا لَمْ يُؤْمِنُوا۟ بِهِۦٓ أَوَّلَ
مَرَّةٍ وَنَذَرُهُمْ فِى طُغْيَـٰنِهِمْ يَعْمَهُونَ ١١٠

And We will turn away their hearts and their sights [from
guidance] because they did not believe in it the first time,
and leave them to wander blindly in their trespass.
Al-Anʿam (Q6:110)

If loving this world can have this devastating effect, we have to pay close attention to the attachments our hearts have to this world. How strong is our love for this world? How strong is our love for Allah? How much of our heart is still dominated and controlled by the glamor of this world? And what are we doing to completely submit, in love, to our Creator? Keep reading, keep learning, keep up with your *duʿa*, and keep changing.

HADITH NINE

الحديث التاسع

The heart and sin

قال رسول الله ﷺ : «إِنَّ الأَمانَةَ نَزَلَتْ في جَذْرِ قُلوبِ الرِّجالِ ثُمَّ نَزَلَ القُرْآنُ فَعَلِموا مِنَ القُرْآنِ وَعَلِموا مِنَ السُّنَّةِ» ثُمَّ حَدَّثَنا عَنْ رَفْعِ الأَمانَةِ قال «يَنامُ الرَّجُلُ النَّوْمَةَ فَتُقْبَضُ الأَمانَةُ مِنْ قَلْبِهِ فَيَظَلُّ أَثَرُها مِثْلَ الوَكْتِ ثُمَّ يَنامُ النَّوْمَةَ فَتُقْبَضُ الأَمانَةُ مِنْ قَلْبِهِ فَيَظَلُّ أَثَرُها مِثْلَ المَجْلِ كَجَمْرٍ دَحْرَجْتَهُ عَلى رِجْلِكَ فَنَفِطَ فَتَراهُ مُنْتَبِرًا وَلَيْسَ فيهِ شَيْءٌ فَيُصْبِحُ النَّاسُ يَتَبايَعونَ لا يَكادُ أَحَدٌ يُؤَدِّي الأَمانَةَ حَتَّى يُقالَ «إِنَّ في بَني فُلانٍ رَجُلاً أَمينًا» حَتّى يُقالَ لِلرَّجُلِ «ما أَجْلَدَهُ ما أَظْرَفَهُ ما أَعْقَلَهُ» وَما في قَلْبِهِ حَبَّةُ خَرْدَلٍ مِنْ إيمانٍ»

رواه البخاري (٦٤٩٧) ومسلم (١٤٣).

The Messenger ﷺ said: «*Amanah* descended in the middle of men's hearts, then the Quran descended and they learned the Quran, and then they learned the Sunnah.» Then he ﷺ told us about the lifting of *amanah* and said: «One would sleep and *amanah* would be lifted from his heart, and a faint dark trace would remain in its place. Then he would sleep again and *amanah* would lifted from his heart and it will leave a trace like a blister, like an ember that you roll down your foot and it swells and you see it puff up but there is nothing inside. And so people would sell and buy with hardly anyone being trustworthy until it will be said: "Among the children of so and so is a trustworthy man," until it will be said about a man: "How strong he is! How handsome and eloquent he is! How wise he is!" And there is no grain of *iman* in his heart.»

Reported by al-Bukhari (6497) and Muslim (143).

Commentary

This *hadith* transports us to the beginnings of the call to Islam and how *iman* was deposited and nourished in the hearts of the first community. It then foretells how, with the passage of time, *iman* and trust between people will diminish.

Amanah

The *amanah* in the *hadith* refers to both *iman* and trustworthiness, both etymologically connected through their root. The meaning that runs through both of them is the stillness, calmness, and quietude of the heart. When we believe something, our hearts get comfortable with that belief; and when we trust and are trusted, the heart is free from agitation (see *Maqayis al-Lughah,* vol. 1, p. 134). *Iman* and *amanah* are both further linked as cause and effect, where trustworthiness is the natural consequence and product of *iman*. *Iman* is the sum of the beliefs and emotions in our hearts, the statements of our tongues, and the actions of our bodies. In other words, *iman* is both our internal and external certitudes and commitments, our fidelity to the principles we believe in. Therefore, our *iman* in Allah will be naturally reflected in our character and actions. We can also think of *amanah* as one of the foundations on which *iman* is built. As the author of *Fayd al-Bari ʿala Sahih al-Bukhari* (vol. 1, p. 126) explains: *amanah* is a quality of the heart by which people get to trust a person, and so it is the basis of *iman*, which is similarly built on trusting Allah and His Messengers. So in this *hadith*, the Prophet ﷺ used *amanah* to describe *iman* as one would name something by one of its most important components. He did that, Allah knows best, to emphasize the importance of *amanah* in the establishment and maintenance of *iman*.

When we think of *iman* in terms of trust, we realize that *iman* is the trust we have in Allah, in what He tells us and promises us. When one possesses this trust, they observe the rights that belong to Allah and those that belong to people. *Iman* and trust, therefore, cannot be separated from each other. The Prophet ﷺ was known before prophethood as al-Amin (the trustworthy), suggesting to us the intimate connection between the purity of the heart and the trustworthiness of the individual. And the Prophet ﷺ made the connection even clearer when he declared:

«المؤمنُ مَن أَمِنَهُ النَّاسُ علَى أَموالِهِمْ وأَنفُسِهِمْ»

رواه ابن ماجه وصححه الألباني (صحيح ابن ماجه ٣١٩٣).

> «The one who has *iman* is the one whom people trust with their wealth and selves.»
>
> Reported by Ibn Majah (3193) and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih Ibn Majah*, 3193).

This trust acts as a barometer of *iman*. The more *iman* we have, the more we would trust Allah and the more trustworthy we would be. People of *iman* should take the greatest care not to trespass people's rights: their property, money, secrets, and hidden mistakes are all inviolable.

In fact, all of Islam could be presented as an *amanah*: Allah entrusts us with the obligations of Islam and asks us to fulfill them. Allah says:

إِنَّا عَرَضۡنَا ٱلۡأَمَانَةَ عَلَى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَٱلۡجِبَالِ فَأَبَيۡنَ
أَن يَحۡمِلۡنَهَا وَأَشۡفَقۡنَ مِنۡهَا وَحَمَلَهَا ٱلۡإِنسَٰنُۖ إِنَّهُۥ كَانَ
ظَلُومٗا جَهُولٗا ٧٢

Indeed we offered the *amanah* to the heavens and the earth and
the mountains and they refused to carry it and were afraid of it but
the human carried it. Indeed he is very unjust and very ignorant.
Al-Ahzab (Q33:72)

Amanah in the *ayah* refers to the obligations that *iman* entails, which include fulfilling our obligations towards Allah and humans. Allah offered these obligations with the caveat that failure will lead to punishment while success will be met with reward. The Heavens, earth, and mountains all feared the gravity of this offer and the difficulty of maintaining these obligations, and so declined to accept them. It was us humans who accepted this responsibility. Oddly, the monumental creations of Allah—the vast Heavens, the great earth, and the mighty mountains—found it intimidating to carry this burden but we, weak humans, didn't. Allah tells us that humanity suffers from both ignorance and injustice; ignorance leads to reckless and wrong decisions and injustice leads to transgression. Ignorance and injustice are the bane of humanity. When we do not distinguish between benefit and harm, we do what harms us and ignore our benefits. And when we get to know, we follow our desires and unjustly pursue corruption. There is no escape from these two states without Allah's help. Consequently, Allah reveals His religion with the knowledge and laws we need to escape our flaws and ascend in wisdom and virtue. We don't have to remain hostage to these states.

Amanah in the hearts

The descent of *amanah* into the middle of the heart is its deposit into the most fundamental and innermost part of the heart. When *iman* was presented to the hearts of the earliest generation of Muslims, it was firmly accepted. This reflects the depth of *iman* in the hearts of the Companions, where they took what the Prophet ﷺ relayed to them as the absolute truth and never doubted it. They gave their hearts in full to Allah the Most Merciful and Allah protected their hearts and bolstered *iman* in them. How many of us today give our hearts, all of it and in earnest, to Allah? To surrender the heart back to its Owner and Creator, to its First and Dearest, without competition from world, ego, or other creature? When they opened their hearts to Allah, they removed from it at the same time other inferior attachments and dependencies, and desired only Allah as its Master. They knew that the heart can only have one true master, and they gave the keys to Allah. After these hearts submitted to Allah, the Quran was revealed and their *iman* increased. These hearts then moved to learn the Sunnah of the Messenger and their *iman* reached its apex. All this left the first community with unparalleled levels of *amanah*: *iman* and trustworthiness.

The learning trajectory of the Companions, described in the *hadith*, is one most worthy of note and emulation. As Jundub ibn Abdullah رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُ said:

> قال جنب بن عبدالله رضي الله عنه: (كنَّا معَ النَّبيِّ صلَّى اللَّهُ عليهِ وسلَّمَ ونحنُ فتيانٌ حَزاوِرَةٌ فتعلَّمنا الإيمانَ قبلَ أن نتعلَّمَ القرآنَ ثمَّ تعلَّمنا القرآنَ فازدَدْنا بِه إيمانًا)
>
> رواه ابن ماجه (٥٢) وصححه الألباني (صحيح ابن ماجه ٥٢).
>
> We were around the Prophet ﷺ in our teenage years [around puberty time], and we learned *iman* before we learned the Quran. Then, we learned the Quran and it increased our *iman*.
>
> Reported by Ibn Majah (52) and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih ibn Majah*, 52).

And Ibn Umar رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا said something similar:

> قال ابن عمر رضي الله عنهما: (لَقَدْ عِشْنَا بُرْهَةً مِنْ دَهْرِنَا وَإِنَّ أَحَدَنا يُؤْتَى الْإِيمَانَ قَبْلَ الْقُرْآنِ وَتَنْزِلُ السُّورَةُ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فَيَتَعَلَّمُ حَلَالَهَا وَحَرَامَهَا وَمَا يَنْبَغِي أَنْ يُوقَفَ عِنْدَهُ فِيهَا كَمَا تَعْلَمُونَ أَنْتُمُ الْقُرْآنَ ثُمَّ لَقَدْ رَأَيْتُ رِجَالًا يُؤْتَى أَحَدُهُمُ الْقُرْآنَ فَيَقْرَأُ مَا بَيْنَ فَاتِحَتِهِ إِلَى خَاتِمَتِهِ مَا يَدْرِي مَا أَمْرُهُ وَلَا زَاجِرُهُ وَلَا مَا يَنْبَغِي أَنْ يُوقَفَ عِنْدَهُ مِنْهُ يَنْثُرُهُ

> نَثْرَ الدَّقَلِ)
>
> رواه الحاكم في المستدرك (١٠١) وقال صحيح على شرط الشيخين
>
> We lived for a while when one of us would be given *iman* before the Quran. Then the *surah* would be revealed to Muhammad ﷺ and one would learn its *halal* and *haram* and what he needs to avoid as you are learning the Quran. Then I saw men who were given the Quran and would read it from beginning to end without knowing its commands, its prohibitions, or what he needs to avoid; he reads it like he dispenses inferior dates.
>
> Reported by al-Hakim in *al-Mustadrak* (101) and he declared it sound.

Al-Hasan al-Basri criticized the same method that fails to extract benefit from the Quran and focuses on rote learning rather than understanding by saying:

> قال الحسن البصري: (إِنَّ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ قَدْ قَرَأَهُ عَبِيدٌ وَصِبْيَانٌ لَا عِلْمَ لَهُمْ بِتَأْوِيلِهِ وَلَمْ يَتَأَوَّلُوا الْأَمْرَ مِنْ أَوَّلِهِ قَالَ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ: ﴿كِتَابٌ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ إِلَيْكَ مُبَارَكٌ لِيَدَّبَّرُوا آيَاتِهِ﴾ [ص: ٢٩] وَمَا تَدَبُّرُ آيَاتِهِ إِلَّا اتِّبَاعُهُ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ أَمَا وَاللَّهِ مَا هُوَ بِحِفْظِ حُرُوفِهِ وَإِضَاعَةِ حُدُودِهِ حَتَّى إِنَّ أَحَدَهُمْ لَيَقُولُ قَدْ قَرَأْتُ الْقُرْآنَ كُلَّهُ فَمَا أُسْقِطُ مِنْهُ حَرْفًا وَقَدْ وَاللَّهِ أَسْقَطَهُ كُلَّهُ مَا تَرَى الْقُرْآنَ لَهُ مِنْ خُلُقٍ وَلَا عَمِلٍ حَتَّى إِنَّ أَحَدَهُمْ لَيَقُولُ إِنِّي لَأَقْرَأُ السُّورَةَ فِي نَفَسٍ وَاحِدٍ وَاللَّهِ مَا هَؤُلَاءِ بِالْقُرَّاءِ وَلَا الْحُكَمَاءِ وَلَا الْوَرَعَةِ مَتَى كَانَتِ الْقُرَّاءُ تَقُولُ مِثْلَ هَذَا لَا أَكْثَرَ اللَّهُ فِي النَّاسِ مِثْلَ هَؤُلَاءِ)
>
> أخلاق أهل القرآن للآجري (ص١٠٠).
>
> Slaves and children have read this Quran without knowledge of what it means, and they did not understand how it all started. Allah said: ﴾A book that we have revealed to you so

> that they can ponder its *ayahs*.﴿ And pondering its *ayahs* is but to follow it, and Allah knows [who truly follows it.] By Allah, it is not by memorizing its letters and missing its commands. One of them would say: “I know the whole Quran and do not drop a single letter.” By Allah, he had dropped all of it! You do not see the Quran in his manners or actions. One of them would say: “I read the *surah* in one breath!” By Allah, these are not the reciters or the wise or the pious. When did the reciters ever say this before? May Allah not make their numbers plenty among the people.
>
> *Akhlaq Ahl al-Quran* (p. 100).

Al-Hasan al-Basri was lamenting the wrong appropriation of the Quran by those who were not yet ready to handle it. The result, as he observed, was a superficial identification with the Quran and misuse of its words and guidance. And we should review our pedagogical strategies based on their example and experience. We can take advantage of our children’s young age and enroll them in Quran memorization classes, in the hope that they will know the whole thing by heart. This was the path of many scholars of Islam till today. But these scholars did not stop at the act of memorization but learned the meaning of what they memorized and studied the Sunnah as well. Therefore, we would be greatly mistaken if we believe that the mere act of memorizing the Quran will save our children or instill the values we want in them. If our children are attempting to memorize the Quran in their teens, we must also teach them *iman*, nurture it in their heart, and connect their hearts to Allah. We have to couple memorization with *tafsir*, words with meaning, and knowledge with action.

Our pious predecessors were superior because they possessed *iman* first and then learned the Quran and Sunnah. The more they learned and practiced, the more their *iman* grew and prospered. This should be the goal that motivates our learning in Islam: to climb the ladder of certainty and piety, and for our knowledge to be realized in our lives. Here is an example of how *amanah* was realized in the life of Yunus ibn Ubayd, one of the followers of the Companions:

> جَاءَ رَجُلٌ شَامِيٌّ إِلَى سُوْقِ الخَزَّازِيْنَ فَقَالَ (عِنْدَكَ مُطْرَفٌ بِأَرْبَعِ مائَةٍ؟) فَقَالَ يُوْنُسُ بن عبيد (عندنا بمئتين) فَنَادَى المُنَادِي الصَّلاَةَ فَانْطَلَقَ يُوْنُسُ إِلَى بَنِي قُشَيْرٍ لِيُصَلِّيَ بِهِم فَجَاءَ وَقَدْ بَاعَ ابْنُ أُخْتِهِ المُطْرَفَ مِنَ الشَّامِيِّ بِأَرْبَعِ مائَةٍ فَقَالَ (مَا هَذِهِ الدَّرَاهِمُ؟) قَالَ (ثَمَنُ ذَاكَ المُطْرَفِ) فَقَالَ (يَا عَبْدَ اللهِ هَذَا المُطْرَفُ الَّذِي عرضته عليك بمئتي درهم فإن شئت فخذه وخذ مئتين وَإِنْ شِئْتَ فَدَعْه) قَالَ (مَنْ أَنْتَ؟) قَالَ (أَنَا رَجُلٌ مِنَ المُسْلِمِيْنَ) قَالَ (أَسْأَلُكَ بِاللهِ من أنت وما اسمك؟) قال (يونس ابن عُبَيْدٍ) قَالَ (فَوَاللهِ إِنَّا لَنَكُوْنُ فِي نَحرِ العَدُوِّ فَإِذَا اشْتَدَّ الأَمرُ عَلَيْنَا قُلْنَا اللَّهُمَّ رَبَّ يُوْنُسَ فَرِّجْ عَنَّا أَوْ شَبِيْهَ هَذَا) فَقَالَ يُوْنُسُ (سُبْحَانَ اللهِ سُبْحَانَ اللهِ)
>
> سير أعلام النبلاء طبعة الرسالة (ج٦ ص٢٨٩).

> A man from al-Sham came to the silk market and asked: “Does anyone have a cloak for four hundred dirhams?” And Yunus replied: “We have it for two hundred.” Then the call to prayer sounded and Yunus headed to Banu Qushayr to lead them in *Salah*. When he came back, he found that his nephew had sold the cloak to that man for four hundred. Yunus asked: “What is all this money?” His nephew replied: “The price of the cloak.” Yunus said [to that man]: “O slave of Allah, the price of the cloak I showed you is two hundred. So you either take it and two hundred dirhams or you leave it.” So the man asked him: “Who are you?” He replied: “One of the Muslims.” He said: “I ask you by Allah, who are you and what is your

> name?” He replied: “Yunus ibn Ubayd.” The man said: “By Allah, we would be in the throes of battle with our enemy, and when it gets intense for us we would say, ‘O Allah, the Rabb of Yunus give us relief or something like that.’ So Yunus replied by saying, “*Subhana Allah*, *Subhana Allah*.”
>
> *Siyar A‘lam al-Nubala’* (vol. 1, p. 289).

And in another instance:

> جاءت يونسَ بنَ عبيدٍ امرأةٌ بِجُبَّةِ خَزٍّ فقالت له (اشترِها) فقال (بكم تبيعينها؟) قالت (بخمس مائة) قال (هي خير من ذلك) قالت (بستمائة) قال (هي خير من ذلك) فلم يزل يقول هي خير من ذلك حتى بلغت ألفاً وقد بذلتها بخمس مائة.
>
> صِفَة الصَّفْوَة (ج٢ ص١٨١).
>
> A woman came to Yunus ibn Ubayd with a dress from silk and wool and said to him: “Buy it.” He asked: “How much are you selling it for?” She said: “For five hundred.” He said: “It is worth more.” She said: “For six hundred.” He said: “It is worth more.” And he continued to say it is worth more until it reached a thousand and she was willing to sell it for five hundred.
>
> *Sifat al-Safwah* (vol. 2, p. 181).

And from Abu Hanifah رَحِمَهُ ٱللَّهُ:

> أَتَتِ امْرَأَةٌ أَبَا حنيفةَ تطلب منه ثوبَ خَزٍّ فأخرج لها ثوبا فَقَالَتْ لَهُ (إني امرأة ضعيفة وإنها أمانة فبعني هَذَا الثوب بما يقوم عليك) فَقَالَ (خذيه بأربعة دراهم) فَقَالَتْ (لا تسخر بي وَأَنَا عجوز كبيرة) فَقَالَ (إني اشتريت ثوبين فبعت أحدهما برأس المال إِلا أربعة دراهم فبقي هَذَا الثوب عَليّ

بأربعة دراهم)

تاريخ بغداد (ج١٥ ص٤٨٧).

> A woman came to Abu Hanifah asking to buy a dress from silk and wool, and he presented her with a dress. She said: "I am a weak woman and it is an *amanah*, so sell me this dress for cost." He said: "Take it for four dirhams." She exclaimed: "Are you making fun of me and I am an old woman!" He replied: "I bought two dresses. I sold the first for the cost of the two except for four dirhams, so four dirhams is what remains."
>
> *Tarikh Baghdad* (vol. 15, p. 487).

Can we learn from their example?

The lifting of amanah

In describing the subsequent lifting of *amanah*, the *hadith* points to a gradual process that takes place as people's sins increase, their *iman* weakens, and temptations around them multiply and intensify. When parts of *amanah* are first removed from the hearts, they leave a simple dark mark behind. This image should remind us of past *hadiths* in this book that explain how the heart blackens with sin. This *hadith* describes the consequence of the gradual erasure of *iman* from our hearts. The danger is that because it is gradual, we may miss it if we are not paying attention. And this is why we should pay serious attention to our *iman* and heart. When a more significant portion of *amanah* is removed, it leave a greater mark that is not easily covered or ignored: a blister. The emptiness of this blister reflects the emptiness of the people who have lost *iman* from their hearts. Though other people may praise them for their appearances and other external markers (e.g. beauty, eloquence, strength), they possess little to no faith inside. It is a comment on how shallow people will be in their judgments at these times, praising each other for superficialities and ignoring the more important character of honesty and trustworthiness.

The *hadith* instructs us on the connection between our behavior with other people and the state of *iman* in our hearts. *Iman* must breed trust, and the loss of trust in an individual or society is a sign that *iman* is compromised. Any individual or community concerned for the well-being of their society must do their best to preserve and nurture *iman* in it. But when *iman* is weakened because of people's sins, their hearts will start to mistrust each other and then turn against each other. Hudhayfah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ the narrator of the *hadith* of this section, lived to see the beginning of the loss of *amanah*. He says in the continuation of the *hadith*:

> (حدَّثنا رسولُ اللهِ صلَّى اللهُ عليهِ وسلَّمَ حديثَينِ رأيتُ أحدَهما وأنا أنتظر الآخرَ [فذكر حديث الباب ثم قال] ولقد أتى عليَّ زمانٌ وما أبالي أيكم بايعتُ لئن كان مسلمًا رده عليَّ الإسلامُ وإن كان نصرانيًا ردَّهُ عليَّ ساعيهِ فأما اليومُ فما كنتُ أبايعُ إلا فلانًا وفلانًا)
>
> رواه البخاري (٦٤٩٧).
>
> The Messenger ﷺ told us about two things. I have seen the first and I am waiting to see the second. [He narrates the *hadith* in this chapter and then said] and I spent a while not worrying about which of you I buy from and sell to. If he were a Muslim, their Islam would bring my right to me; and if he were a Christian, the one who oversees him would bring my right to me. But today, I would only deal with so-and-so and so-and-so.
>
> Reported by al-Bukhari (6497).

Hudhayfah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ lived in a time where he could trust any Muslim he dealt with simply because of the *iman* in their hearts. We can imagine how close-knit such a society would be, where its members are honest and have only love and respect in their hearts for each other. All this changes when people turn away from Allah and start putting more of their trust in the world. As they start competing for material gains, their love for themselves and the world pushes them to envy, cheat, lie, and hate. When a society is corrupt and greedy, when its members lose trust in each other, this society marches towards its own disintegration and demise.

Trusting Allah

Trusting Allah brings trust between people, just as loving Allah is what brings love between people. Allowing our hearts to trust Allah is what will change our lives, individually and collectively. When we believe in Allah's words, we believe that He guides us to the best of actions and truest of beliefs. Holding on to this guidance melts the impurities of our hearts away as we turn to Him and away from the glorification of self and desire. Rather than living self-seeking lives, trusting Allah allows us to live a life of modesty, self-abnegation, and altruism. It is trusting and loving the world that destroys us, the belief that we can find the love and happiness we need in an ephemeral and corrupt world. Only Allah can bring serenity to our hearts.

HADITH TEN

الحديث العاشر

The heart and sexual desire

قال رسول الله ﷺ: «كُتِبَ على ابْنِ آدَمَ نصيبُهُ منَ الزِّنا مُدْرِكٌ ذلك لا مَحالَةَ فالعَينانِ زِناهُما النَّظَرُ والأُذُنانِ زِناهُما الاستِماعُ واللِّسانُ زِناهُ الكلامُ واليَدُ زِناها البَطْشُ والرِّجْلُ زِناها الخُطا والقَلْبُ يَهْوى ويَتَمَنَّي ويُصَدِّقُ ذلكَ الفَرْجُ ويُكَذِّبُهُ»

رواه البخاري (٦٦١٢) ومسلم (٢٦٥٧) واللفظ لمسلم.

The Messenger ﷺ said: «Written on the child of Adam is their share of fornication, they will surely meet what is written for them. The fornication of the eyes is in looking, and the ears is in listening, and the tongue in talking, and the hands in touching, and the feet in walking. And the heart desires and wishes, and the private parts confirm this or reject it.»

Reported by al-Bukhari (6612) and Muslim (2657).

Commentary

The disease of the heart comes from *shubuhat* (doubts) or *shahawat* (desires). And among our desires, few are as intense and have the potential to be destructive as our attraction to the opposite sex. In this *hadith*, we see how body and heart react to illicit desire and how desires progress into illicit acts.

Gateways of the heart

The eyes and ears are the two most important conduits into the heart. It is primarily through what we see and hear that the heart has access to the outside world, and the thoughts and preoccupations of the heart reflect the images and news that these two senses bring into it. The heart in turn dispatches these two organs to fetch for it its needs and interests. When our heart longs for something, it directs the eyes and ears to seek it, and once they find it to pay special attention to it. So these two senses both influence the heart and are influenced by it.

Because of their importance, our eyes and ears are the greatest channels for enlivening our hearts and building our *iman*. When we yearn to hear the words of our Creator, our eyes and ears take us to the Quran and our heart can quench its thirst for the truth. When we look at and ponder the universe around us, we're filled with awe of Allah's power and with humility before Him. When we want to inject more mercy and kindness into our hearts, we observe the weak, sick, and poor around us to awake from our worldly slumber and compassionately share what we have with them. Our eyes and ears can lead us to Heaven or, if misused, to Hell.

Allah, the Most Wise, commands us to pay close attention to our eyes and ears and how we use them. He exhorts us in the Quran to use our senses to reflect on Allah's creation and witness the dire consequence of rebellion against Him. Allah says:

أَوَلَمۡ يَنظُرُواْ فِي مَلَكُوتِ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِ وَمَا خَلَقَ ٱللَّهُ
مِن شَيۡءٖ وَأَنۡ عَسَىٰٓ أَن يَكُونَ قَدِ ٱقۡتَرَبَ أَجَلُهُمۡۖ

Do they not look into the greatness of the heavens and the
earth and everything that Allah has created and ponder that
their end may be near?
Al-Aʿraf (Q7:185)

Allah also says:

أَفَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا۟ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ فَيَنظُرُوا۟ كَيْفَ كَانَ
عَـٰقِبَةُ ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ ۗ

Did they not travel through the earth and observe what the end of those before them was?

Yusuf (Q12:109)

And He also says:

وَٱصْبِرْ نَفْسَكَ مَعَ ٱلَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ رَبَّهُم بِٱلْغَدَوٰةِ وَٱلْعَشِىِّ
يُرِيدُونَ وَجْهَهُۥ ۖ وَلَا تَعْدُ عَيْنَاكَ عَنْهُمْ تُرِيدُ
زِينَةَ ٱلْحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنْيَا ۖ

And keep yourself patiently with those who call upon their Rabb in the morning and the evening, seeking His Face. And don't let your eyes pass beyond them, desiring the adornments of the worldly life.

Al-Kahf (Q18:28)

In these *ayahs*, Allah wants us to preserve our eyes and senses and move them towards what benefits us. Contemplating the majesty of the universe leads us to greater certainty in Allah and in His great names and attributes. Our eyes and ears bring to life the history of nations that disobeyed Allah and suffered the consequence of their misguided ways. Our senses bring us wisdom when we study the lifestyle and manners of the pious, dead or alive: their words and actions, their choices in life, remind us of what it means to love Allah and be loved by Him. To attain this knowledge and benefits, we must guard our eyes from the glamor of the world. Allah says in another *ayah*:

وَلَا تَمُدَّنَّ عَيْنَيْكَ إِلَىٰ مَا مَتَّعْنَا بِهِۦٓ أَزْوَٰجًا مِّنْهُمْ زَهْرَةَ
ٱلْحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنْيَا لِنَفْتِنَهُمْ فِيهِ ۚ وَرِزْقُ رَبِّكَ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَىٰ ﴿١٣١﴾

And do not extend your eyes toward what We made some of them enjoy, the splendor of the worldly life by which We test them. And the bounties from your Rabb are better and more lasting.
Taha (Q20:131)

Since our hearts can gravitate easily to and be tempted by worldly glitter, Allah instructs us not to preoccupy ourselves with it or allow it entry into our hearts. If our eyes and ears constantly spend time browsing and admiring the world (e.g. big houses, fast cars, and latest fashion and brands), our hearts would not be able to escape its material hold and will drown in its love. Note how a worldly glance can have such a strong effect in what the Prophet ﷺ said:

«إذا نظر أحدُكُم إلى من فُضِّل عليه في المالِ والخَلْقِ فلينظُرْ إلى من هو أسفلُ منه»

رواه البخاري (٦٤٩٠) ومسلم (٢٩٦٣)

«If one of you looks at one who is superior to him in wealth and appearance, let him look at one who is inferior to him.»

Reported by al-Bukhari (6490) and Muslim (2963).

When we notice that someone else is richer and more beautiful than we are, we often become angry, envious, and unhappy with our lot in life. This may be an inadvertent look or an intentional one, but it brings plenty of sorrow and pain to our hearts. The remedy, however, is in a counter-look that seeks those who have less. When we compare ourselves to them, we will rediscover the great blessings that Allah had filled our lives with. The *hadith* illustrates how profound a single look can be in affecting our moods and our heart.

Since *zina* (fornication and adultery) begins with a look and a word, the Prophet ﷺ called the licentious look the eyes' *zina*, and listening to the lascivious word the ears' *zina*. Each part of the body that participates in the lead-up to the final act of *zina* is committing its portion of *zina*. Looking at what Allah prohibited or listening to it stirs the desire for fornication in the heart. The wayward look has been described as a poisonous arrow from the quiver of Shaytan: when the arrow reaches the heart, it is hard to find a cure for it. The eyes can bring back to the heart a beautiful image that floods the heart with such desire that it becomes the only thing the heart thinks about. The ears can transfer words and phrases that undo the hearts resolve for piety and smooth the way for indecency. The heart then sends the eyes and ears to collect hints and possibilities of fornication, and this only increases the heart's disease and weakness. There is a loop between the probity of the heart and the senses: each one of them spoils or reforms the other.

The heart is like a mill that never stops working, and our senses collect the grains for it. If what the senses gather is wholesome, the heart gives nutritious products. But if the senses collect rocks and glass, the mill can only grind and produce crushed rocks and glass. Similarly, when we send our eyes and ears to capture anything around us, without discrimination or filters, we would be dumping all sort of trash into our heart, poisoning it and ruining its potential for *iman* and *taqwa*. The eyes and ears are the gates to the heart, and they should be guarded like one does a treasure hidden in a fortress that is under attack.

In addition to avoiding the *haram*, permissible sights and sounds that have a detrimental influence on us should be avoided until they stop having that effect. If any of us finds themselves sexually attracted to people we shouldn't be attracted to, we should avoid being alone with them and we should restrain our looks. If we keep our distance, busy ourselves with worship and good actions, and pray to Allah to help us overcome this attraction, we will be able to overcome its evil consequences by the Will of Allah. Its trace may linger in the heart for a while, but if we're able to avoid *haram* acts, we'll eventually conquer these feelings.

The fitnah of the opposite sex

Among the many temptations we face in this life, few can be as intense and consuming as our attraction to the opposite sex. In fact, it is listed at the top of the worldly desires that have been made attractive to us in the Quran when Allah says:

> زُيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ حُبُّ ٱلشَّهَوَٰتِ مِنَ ٱلنِّسَآءِ وَٱلْبَنِينَ وَٱلْقَنَٰطِيرِ
> ٱلْمُقَنطَرَةِ مِنَ ٱلذَّهَبِ وَٱلْفِضَّةِ وَٱلْخَيْلِ ٱلْمُسَوَّمَةِ
> وَٱلْأَنْعَٰمِ وَٱلْحَرْثِ ۗ
>
> What people desire of women and sons, heaped-up sums of gold and silver, fine branded horses, cattle, and tilled land had been made beautiful to people.
>
> Al Imran (Q3:14)

Because of how strong this attraction is, coupled with human weakness, the *hadith* in this chapter explains in its opening sentence that seldom do people escape from the clutches of the sins it lists. These sins are written in the sense that they are inevitable in one form or another, not that humans are compelled to do them. And because these various minor sins are so prevalent and can lead eventually to the actual major sin of *zina*, it is important that we guard our senses and body parts from them. When we think of the sins of the various body parts as their contribution in the buildup to *zina*, we would be very averse to starting and continuing with them.

The progression of sinful thoughts

We glean from the *hadith* that sins develop from small glances and few words to a lewd act that defiles the entire body. Shaytan does not begin his whispers suggesting we commit the most heinous of sins, for we would naturally reject it. Rather, he proceeds gradually. He starts with suggesting the smallest sin he can convince us to commit, taking us one small step closer to the major one. When we accept the first whisper, he introduces the next sin in line and so on until we, without noticing, reach the greatest sin.

We are also introduced to each individual sin gradually. Each sin starts as a passing thought (*khatrah*). We then either reject it or we let it in. If we let it in, it turns into a recurring whisper (*waswasah*), and after that we start having an internal conversation about it (*hadith al-nafs*). If the thought is not rejected at this stage, it becomes an act we are inclined to do but have not yet resolved to (*al-hamm*). The final step is the determined intent to commit the act (*al-ʿazm*) (see *al-Tibyan fi Ayman al-Quran* by Ibn al-Qayyim, p. 635 from the *Majmuʿ Athar Ibn al-Qayyim* series).

خَطْرَة ‹ وَسْوَسَة ‹ حديثُ النَّفْس ‹ الهَمُّ ‹ العَزْمُ

It is easiest to stop sin at its earliest stages and more difficult at the later ones. Sin as a passing thought is at its weakest, and we can push it away with *dhikr*, relying on Allah, praying to Him, staying away from bad company, and seeking the pious. Solitude with such thoughts is perilous. When we indulge these thoughts, they take root into our mind and heart and become harder to remove. When we reach the level of the determined intent, it is most likely that the action will take place. If we wish to stop ourselves from sin, we have to fight it at its inception: it is far easier to reject a passing thought than it is to battle a preoccupation.

These thoughts emanate from external sources (e.g. an image we just saw) or from our imagination, especially when we are satiated with food. Our desires are at their strongest when we are sated, when we are laziest to worship Allah. These thoughts are also strongest during leisure times. The *khatrah* finds space in an empty heart, empty of Allah's love and fear and empty of good thoughts and intentions. Battling evil thoughts requires filling our hearts with *iman*, trust in Allah, and concrete plans to do good in our day/week/month/year. When the heart is full, there is little space left in it for evil and depressing thoughts.

The heart wishes and hopes

The desire for fornication is one of the diseases of the heart. Allah says in the Quran:

يَٰنِسَآءَ ٱلنَّبِيِّ لَسۡتُنَّ كَأَحَدٖ مِّنَ ٱلنِّسَآءِ إِنِ ٱتَّقَيۡتُنَّۚ فَلَا تَخۡضَعۡنَ
بِٱلۡقَوۡلِ فَيَطۡمَعَ ٱلَّذِي فِي قَلۡبِهِۦ مَرَضٞ وَقُلۡنَ قَوۡلٗا مَّعۡرُوفٗا ٣٢

O wives of the Prophet, you are not like other women if you are pious. So do not speak softly so that he who is diseased in heart would be moved by desire. And speak honorably.

Al-Ahzab (Q33:32)

As the *ayah* explains, the one who has a disease in his heart, the disease of desiring fornication as al-Sa'di explains in his *Tafsir*, would be affected and moved to sin by female soft speech. By implication, the one who is sound of heart loathes *zina* and is not moved to sin by such voice. The *ayah* presents us with a test through which we can examine our hearts to see if they desire this sin.

Many may stay away from *zina* not because Allah hates it but because the opportunity has not presented itself: they fear the consequences of being found out, they don't know where to go for it, or they did not find the one who agrees to do it with them. This person stays away from *zina* as long as these obstacles persist, but if the opportunity presents itself, he will take advantage of it. This is the complete opposite of the one who fears Allah and would never commit this sin even if there were no worldly repercussions, even if he was to be rewarded for it. It is then that we understand the great trial of Prophet Yusuf عَلَيۡهِ ٱلسَّلَامُ. He was a young man, a slave in a strange land. A beautiful, rich, and powerful woman invited him to what angers Allah and he emphatically declined. He had little or no worldly repercussions to fear, all the perks he could ask for and imagine, and a young man's desire for women. Yet he preferred the bondage of the dungeon to the luxury and wealth this sin would bring him. This was a man who truly loved and feared Allah.

The *hadith* explains the fornication of the heart in both its desire (*hawa*) and wish (*amani*) for fornication. The desire refers to what is close by and possible (e.g. people we know) while the wish is for what is unlikely or impossible (e.g. celebrities and models). Hearts can entertain both types of fantasies and, when they do, become gradually more accepting of fornication for itself and others around it. Though engaging in fantasies of *zina* may seem harmless to some, it does normalize the act and pave the way for it. It's mentally prepping for a future act. It also increases our love for it. Harboring love for this sin contradicts the *iman* of the heart. Whoever worries about the health of their heart must refrain from these fantasies and flee from *zina* and anything that brings it closer to it.

If we are vulnerable to these types of fantasies when we are alone, then we shouldn't be alone. We can spend more time with family and friends, engage in philanthropic activities, worship Allah more, spend more time at the masjid, and attend/listen to Islamic lectures. If we engage in these fantasies as an escape because of our real-life frustrations, we should remember that they don't solve problems or improve reality. Rather than long for what we don't have, we should ask Allah to make us happy with what we have and to grant us more of His *halal* bounties. If we allow our leisure time to drag us down the dangerous road of sin, our desires will soon destroy our lives. The path to Jannah passes through the gates of sacrifice and self-control. As al-Fudayl ibn ‘Iyad said:

> قَالَ الْفُضَيْلُ بنُ عِياض: (تُرِيدُ الْجَنَّةَ مَعَ النَّبِيِّينَ وَالصِّدِّيقِينَ وَتُرِيدُ أَنْ تَقِفَ الْمَوْقِفُ مَعَ نُوحٍ وَإِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمُحَمَّدٍ عَلَيْهِمُ الصَّلَاةُ وَالسَّلَامُ بِأَيِّ عَمَلٍ وَأَيُّ شَهْوَةٍ تَرَكْتَهَا لِلَّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ وَأَيُّ قَرِيبٍ بَاعَدْتَهُ فِي اللهِ وَأَيُّ بَعِيدٍ قَرَّبْتَهُ فِي اللهِ)
>
> حُلية الأولياء (ج٨ ص٩٠)
>
> You want Heaven with the Prophets and *siddiqun*? And you want to stand on the Day of Judgment with Nuh, Ibrahim, and Muhammad عَلَيۡهِمُ ٱلسَّلَامُ? By what deed? What desire did you leave for Allah the Most High? What near-one did you distance for the sake of Allah? What distant-one did you bring near for the sake of Allah?
>
> *Hilyat al-Awliya’* (vol. 8, p. 90).

HADITH ELEVEN

الحديث الحادي عشر

Good character and the heart

صَعِدَ رسول الله ﷺ المِنبَرَ فنادى بِصَوْتٍ رَفيعٍ فقالَ: «يا مَعْشَرَ مَنْ أَسْلَمَ بِلِسانِهِ وَلَمْ يُفْضِ الإيمانُ إلى قَلْبِهِ لا تُؤْذوا المسلمينَ ولا تُعَيِّروهمْ ولا تَتَّبِعوا عَوْراتِهِمْ فَإِنَّهُ مَنْ يَتَّبِعْ عَوْرَةَ أَخيهِ المسلمِ يَتَّبِعِ اللهُ عَوْرَتَهُ ومَن يَتَّبِعِ اللهُ عَوْرَتَهُ يَفْضَحْهُ وَلَوْ في جَوْفِ رَحْلِهِ»

رواه الترمذي (٢٠٣٢) وأبو داود (٤٨٨٠) وصححه الألباني في صحيح أبي داود (٤٨٨٠).

The Messenger ﷺ ascended the pulpit and cried out: «O you who have accepted Islam by tongue but *iman* is yet to penetrate their hearts: do not harm the Muslims, and do not shame them, and do not trace their faults, for the one who traces the faults of his Muslim brother will have Allah tracing his faults. And the one whom Allah traces his faults, Allah will disgrace even if he was concealed inside his home.»

Reported by al-Tirmidhi (2032) and Abu Dawud (4880) and declared *sahih* by al-Albani in *Sahih Abi Dawud* (4880).

Commentary

One important fruit of cleansing our hearts from disease and growing *iman* in them is improved character and decorum. When we purify our hearts, we also cleanse our body of bad habits, treat others with greater kindness, and strive to reach social harmony and love in our communities. Our behavior, and the state of our Muslim community, is an indicator of the status of our hearts and the *iman* that lives in them.

Iman and good character

The transgressions we commit are a direct consequence of the weakness or absence of *iman* in our hearts. The *hadith* alerts us that we mustn't be satisfied with an artificial or superficial *iman* that stays as clichés on the tongue. We should strive and nourish *iman* in our hearts until it becomes the greatest reality and motivator in our lives.

The *hadith* begins by referencing those with *iman* on the tongues alone, and this could mean hypocrites who have no *iman* at all or Muslims with weak *iman*. The *hadith* is similar to the *ayah* in the Quran where some nomads claimed *iman* and Allah corrected their claim and said:

> قَالَتِ ٱلْأَعْرَابُ ءَامَنَّا ۖ قُل لَّمْ تُؤْمِنُوا۟ وَلَـٰكِن
> قُولُوٓا۟ أَسْلَمْنَا وَلَمَّا يَدْخُلِ ٱلْإِيمَـٰنُ فِى قُلُوبِكُمْ ۖ
>
> The Bedouins say: "We have believed." Say: "You have not believed." But say: "We have submitted," for *iman* has not yet entered your hearts.
>
> Al-Hujurat (Q49:14)

The Quranic commentators explain that the *ayah* is speaking either about hypocrites with no *iman* or those who genuinely accepted Islam but hadn't absorbed the richness of *iman* in their hearts. There is an overlap between the two categories in that the external show of faith is greater than its internal reality, and there may be some overlap in their behavior as well. Allah tells us in the Quran that the hypocrites target the believers with their scorn and ridicule, with a clear desire for hurting them and breaking their spirit.

Allah the Most Merciful says:

ٱلَّذِينَ يَلۡمِزُونَ ٱلۡمُطَّوِّعِينَ مِنَ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ فِي
ٱلصَّدَقَٰتِ وَٱلَّذِينَ لَا يَجِدُونَ إِلَّا جُهۡدَهُمۡ فَيَسۡخَرُونَ
مِنۡهُمۡ سَخِرَ ٱللَّهُ مِنۡهُمۡ وَلَهُمۡ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ٧٩

> The ones who defame the believers who voluntarily give charity, and defame those who could only give what little that is available to them, so they mock at them.
>
> Al-Tawbah (Q9:79)

Al-Bukhari and Muslim narrate the reason behind the revelation of this *ayah*:

> لمَّا نزلتْ آيةُ الصدقةِ كُنَّا نُحامِلُ فجاء رجلٌ فتصدَّق بشيٍء كثيرٍ فقالوا (مُرائِي) وجاء رجلٌ فتصدَّقَ بصاعٍ فقالوا (إنّ اللهَ لغنيٌّ عن صاعِ هذا) فنزلتْ ﴿الَّذِينَ يَلْمِزُونَ الْمُطَّوِّعِينَ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ فِي الصَّدَقَاتِ وَالَّذِينَ لا يَجِدُونَ إِلَّا جُهْدَهُمْ﴾ الآية.
>
> رواه البخاري (١٤١٥) ومسلم (١٠١٨).
>
> When the *ayah* of charity was revealed we used to carry loads on our backs to earn what we could donate. And a man came and donated a considerable amount and they [the hypocrites] said: “He is showing off.” And another came and donated little and they said: “Allah does not need this one’s insignificant charity.” So the *ayah* was revealed: ﴾The ones who defame the believers who voluntarily give charity, and defame those who could only give what little that is available to them.﴿
>
> Al-Bukhari (1415) and Muslim (1018).

We notice from this *hadith* the cynical views that the hypocrites had and tried to spread, a likely reflection of a cynical heart that stopped believing that there is anything good left in this life. The believers couldn’t win no matter what they did and how much or little they spent; it was always scorned and disparaged. The hatred in the hearts of the hypocrites fueled a relentless attack on Islamic worship and the people of *iman*. The following *hadith* recounts another of these attacks:

> قال رجلٌ في غزوةِ تبوكَ في مجلسٍ يومًا (ما رأيتُ مثلَ قرَّائِنا هؤلاءِ لا أرغبَ بطونًا ولا أكذَبَ ألسِنَةً ولا أجبَنَ عند اللِّقاءِ) فقال رجلٌ في المجلِسِ (كذبتَ ولكنَّكَ منافقٌ لأخبرَنَّ رسولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عليهِ وعلى آلِهِ وسلَّمَ) فبلغَ ذلك النَّبيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عليهِ وعلى آلِهِ وسلَّمَ ونزل القرآنُ.
>
> رواه الطبري في تفسيره وصححه أحمد شاكر في تفسير الطبري والوادعي في صحيح أسباب النزول.
>
> A man in a gathering during the expedition of Tabuk said: “I have not seen people who are more gluttonous, greater liars, or more cowardly than our learned ones.” So a man sitting in the gathering said: “You are lying. You are a hypocrite. I will tell the Messenger ﷺ.” So this news reached the Messenger ﷺ and [an *ayah* from] the Quran was revealed.
>
> Reported by al-Tabari in his *Tafsir* and declared *sahih* by Ahmad Shakir in *Tafsir al-Tabari* and al-Wadi‘i in *Sahih Asbab al-Nuzul.*

The *ayah* that was revealed was:

> يَحۡذَرُ ٱلۡمُنَٰفِقُونَ أَن تُنَزَّلَ عَلَيۡهِمۡ سُورَةٞ
> تُنَبِّئُهُم بِمَا فِي قُلُوبِهِمۡۚ قُلِ ٱسۡتَهۡزِءُوٓاْ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ مُخۡرِجٞ مَّا
> تَحۡذَرُونَ ﴿٦٤﴾ وَلَئِن سَأَلۡتَهُمۡ لَيَقُولُنَّ إِنَّمَا كُنَّا
> نَخُوضُ وَنَلۡعَبُۚ قُلۡ أَبِٱللَّهِ وَءَايَٰتِهِۦ وَرَسُولِهِۦ
> كُنتُمۡ تَسۡتَهۡزِءُونَ ﴿٦٥﴾
>
> They hypocrites fear lest a *surah* be revealed about them, informing them of what is in their hearts. Say: "Mock! Indeed, Allah will expose that which you fear." And if you ask them, they will surely say: "We were only talking and joking." Say, "Is it Allah and His *ayahs* and His Messenger that you were mocking?"
>
> Al-Tawbah (Q9:64–65)

The disease of hypocrisy didn't allow them to see the truth or to appreciate the goodness of the faithful. Muslims with diseases in their hearts will also suffer from lack of recognition and appreciation, and they may possess partial hatred and resentment in their heart towards the believers. We can see that in the cynicism some of us have towards many things related to Islam and Muslims. The cause of these awkward sentiments is a weak *iman* that did not cure our hearts and reform them, a weak *iman* that does not drive us to love virtue and hate indecency, a weak *iman* that does not affect our lives and actions.

This discrepancy between external and internal *iman* is most odd and damaging when it is carried out by people who are supposed to be religious. The misguided Khawarij group that rose at the time of Ali ibn Abi Talib رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُ exhibited this disconnect when they slaughtered Muslims yet claimed *taqwa* and proximity to Allah. The Prophet ﷺ said about them:

«يقرؤون القرآن لا يجاوز تَرَاقِيَهُم»
رواه البخاري (٣٦١٠).

«They will read the Quran but it will not go past their throats.»

Reported by al-Bukhari (3610).

These are people who demonstrated impressive acts of worship to the extent that the Companions themselves belittled their fasting and prayers compared to them. They also engaged in reading the Quran, and plenty of it, but failed to digest and absorb it into their hearts and souls; it remained words on tongues.

When Muslims ridicule and defame others, they announce the weakness of their *iman*. Their *iman* is not strong enough to guide their practice, much less to change their hearts. Unless *iman* finds its way into our hearts and is allowed to blossom, we as individuals and communities will continue to suffer from moral and ethical failings, no matter how much Quran we read or how much we pray and fast. There is a difference between perfunctory worship and a heartfelt one.

The *hadith* beautifully explains the cure for all of this. Knowing Allah and believing in Him is the cure to all diseases of the heart. Because of *iman*, we perform our duties towards Allah and towards people, and we refrain from harming anyone and anything. But when the heart lacks *iman* and knowledge, it will undoubtedly fail to observe any of these rights, and will eventually launch a campaign of corruption and terror on this earth. Our *iman* is what brings peace to heart and body, individual and community.

Harm, shame, and seeking other's mistakes

The Prophet ﷺ warned in the *hadith* of three connected acts. The first is harming other Muslims, verbally or physically. The second offense is a particular type of verbal harm: trying to shame and disgrace Muslims.

Examples include resurrecting their old mistakes and past or trying to demean them because of skin color, economic status, line of work, place of birth, or any other quality and feature that loses them public respectability. The third offense, a consequences of the intent to hurt and demean, is seeking to expose their faults by spying on them, probing to unearth their faults, and going public with their mistakes once found. The desire here is definitely to destroy.

There is, of course, a time and place for criticism. Critique can be valid or invalid. Valid critique is one that makes the right point at the right time and place, and in proportion to the mistake it is trying to correct. Invalid critique, which may be called defamation or transgression, is one that argues the wrong point, or it argues the right point at the wrong time and place, or the wrong way. The defining difference between the two types of critiques is the desire to please Allah, the mercy we have in our hearts towards Muslims, and following the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ in reforming mistakes. Invalid critique is often carried out for personal reasons, no matter how much we try to dress it up as zeal for the faith. Invalid critique aims to destroy and not reform the other person, it aims to elevate us and not to elevate the truth, and its goal is to make us feel better about ourselves. Those who advise and critique in order to defame are the brethren of the hypocrites, according to Ibn Rajab, because they act like them (*Al-Farq bayna al-Nasiha wa al-Ta‘yir*, p. 22).

The reason we unjustly focus on the mistakes of others is that we are simply unaware of our own mistakes. One of the major impediments to the purification of the soul is blindness to its flaws. This dangerous unawareness gives us the false impression that there is nothing wrong with us, or at least nothing seriously wrong. Yet this preoccupation itself is a warning sign that we have neglected our souls. Seeking the mistakes of others and talking about it is a sin, and it also deprives us of the time that we need to spend on correcting our own faults. As a result, we carry the heaviest loads of sins. Ibn Sirin explained:

> قال محمد بن سيرين رحمه الله: (كنا نتحدث أن أكثرَ الناس خطايا أفرغُهم لذكر خطايا الناس)
>
> حياة السلف بين القول والعمل (ص٧٨٥).
>
> We used to say that the person with the most sins is the person with the most time to talk about other people's sins.
>
> *Hayat al-Salaf bayna al-Qawl wa al-'Amal* (p. 785).

It could also be that our sharp-sightedness when it comes to people's mistakes is punished with blindness when it comes to our own. This is the sentiment al-Sariyy expresses when he says:

> قال السَّرِيُّ السَّقَطي: (مِن علامة الاستدراج العمَى عن عيوب النفس)
>
> حياة السلف بين القول والعمل (ص٧٨٥).
>
> Of the signs of being led astray is to be blind to your own faults.
>
> *Hayat al-Salaf bayna al-Qawl wa al-'Amal* (p. 785).

The one who cannot see his own mistakes cannot fix them; it is that simple. And yet this fault-ridden individual will think that he is fault-free! Conversely, it is a blessing and a favor from Allah to be made aware of our own mistakes. Muhammad ibn Ka'b explains:

> قَالَ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ كَعْبٍ الْقُرَظِيِّ: (إِذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِعَبْدٍ خَيْرًا زَهَّدَهُ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَفَقَّهَهُ فِي الدِّينِ وَبَصَّرَهُ عُيُوبَهُ وَمَنْ أُوتِيهِنَّ أُوتِيَ خَيْرَ الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ)
>
> الزهد لوكيع (ص٢١٧).
>
> If Allah wants the best for someone, He makes him disinclined towards the world, teaches him religious knowledge, and makes him aware of his own faults. The one who is given these

> is given the goodness of this world and the next.
>
> *Zuhd* by Waki‘ (p. 217).

The more time we spend looking inwardly, inspecting for mistakes and faults and trying to heal, the less time, energy, and desire we will have to run after people's mistakes.

The punishment fits the crime

The fact that the Prophet ﷺ climbed the *minbar* (pulpit) and cried out the words of this *hadith*, is enough evidence of the gravity of the matter. This was a public advice and admonition to remind Muslims of their duties and the proper way to act.

The last part of the *hadith* is meant to remind us that our actions do have consequences. If we want to proceed, we should be aware of the fallout and be ready for it. If we do what Allah hates, we may very well be punished for it. But Allah's punishment is just, and is of the nature of the sins and crimes that we commit. If we make the mistakes of other Muslims public, we may be punished by Allah revealing our deepest mistakes and faults to everyone. And since Allah knows all of our secrets and what we try our hardest to hide from everyone, our punishment for this crime may well be more damaging than the evil we are trying to bring upon another Muslim. The fact that we may be visited by such strong punishment should be enough of a deterrent not to ever broadcast others' faults or compromise their reputation in any way. The following *hadith*, though WEAK, carries a stern warning in it:

> «لا تُظْهِر الشماتة بأخيك فيعافيه الله ويبتليك»
>
> رواه الترمذي (٢٥٠٦) وضعفه الألباني في ضعيف الترمذي (٢٥٠٦).
>
> «Do not express glee at your brother's misfortune lest Allah cures him and afflicts you.»
>
> Reported by al-Tirmidhi (2506) and declared WEAK by al-Albani (*Da‘if*

> *al-Tirmidhi*, 2506).

Al-Hasan al-Basri says something similar:

> قال الحسن: (كان يقال من عيَّر أخاه بذنب تاب منه لم يمت حتى يبتليه الله به)
>
> الفرق بين النصيحة والتعيير (ص٢٠).
>
> It was said that the one who disgraces one because of a sin that he repented from would not die until Allah afflicts him with the same sin.
>
> *Al-Farq bayna al-Nasiha wa al-Ta'yir* (p. 20).

You can sense here the beauty of the justice of Allah where one gets to experience the very same pain they tried to inflict on others. And it is precisely through this experience that we will understand the nature of our offense and seek forgiveness for it. One statement that Makhul uttered had a profound consequence on him. He said:

> قال مكحول رحمه الله: (رأيت رجلًا يصلي وكلما ركع وسجد بكى فاتهمته أنه يرائي ببكائه فَحُرِمْتُ البكاء سنة)
>
> تهذيب حلية الأولياء (ج٢ ص١٨٢).
>
> I saw a man praying and whenever he bowed and prostrated, he cried. I accused him of being a show-off and so I was deprived of crying for one year.
>
> *Tahdhib Hilyat al-Awliya'* (vol. 2, p. 182).

Makhul is someone who used to cry in his prayer and when he used to read the Quran. Just because of this statement, he lost the ability to cry for a whole year! Many of us have not cried for years and we don't see anything wrong with it! Yet Makhul saw it as a punishment. So how long have our eyes been dry, possibly as a punishment, and we are unaware and unconcerned about it?

Ibn Sirin also went through an experience where something he said had a direct and major effect on his life.

> لما ركب ابن سيرين الدَّيْن وحبس به قال: (إني أعرف الذنب الذي أصابني هذا عيَّرت رجلاً منذ أربعين سنة فقلت له يا مفلس)
>
> الفرق بين النصيحة والتعيير (ص٢١).
>
> When Ibn Sirin was insolvent and was put in jail because of it he said: "I know the sin that brought this on me. Forty years ago, I shamed someone by calling him: 'O bankrupt.'"
>
> *Al-Farq bayna al-Nasiha wa al-Ta'yir* (p. 21).

Our tongues are our path to Paradise or Hell. When we talk about others' faults, gossip about them, and spread their secrets, we would be disseminating indecency and sin among Muslims. This is the quality of the hypocrites who love to spread rumors and hurt the believers, and they will be met with great punishment (see *Surah al-Nur*, *ayah* 19). Such acts shake the believers' trust in each other and spread great animosity between them at a time when we need to be supporting each other. These acts cause great alienation, where some feel unwelcomed in inhospitable communities and mosques that are quick to condemn them and gossip about them. These acts tear down our role-models and leave the moral landscape barren.

No living and pure heart can tolerate this behavior and the pain it causes. No clean heart would ever want to reproduce the model of the hypocrites and their destructive influence in the Muslim community. A heart with *iman* and *taqwa* is also filled with mercy and best wishes for those around it. But if we partake of the behavior that the Prophet ﷺ condemned, then it is because our *iman* is suffering. And we should spend our time fixing that rather than worrying about who did what and why.

HADITH TWELVE

الحديث الثاني عشر

Greed and the heart

قالَ رسول الله ﷺ: «لا يَجْتَمِعُ الشُّحُّ والْإيمانُ فِي قَلْبِ عَبْدٍ أَبَدًا»

رواه النسائي (٣١١٠) والبخاري في الأدب المفرد (٢٨١) وحسن اسناده ابن حجر وصححه الألباني (صحيح النسائي ٣١١٠).

The Messenger ﷺ said: «*Shuh* and *iman* will never coexist in the heart of a slave of Allah.»

Reported by al-Nasa'i (3110) and al-Bukhari in *al-Adab al-Mufrad* (281). It was declared *hasan* by Ibn Hajar and *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Nasa'i*, 3110).

Commentary

We've seen in the last *hadith* how one of the biggest obstacles to purifying our hearts is unawareness of their flaws. In this *hadith*, the Prophet ﷺ points to a foundational and major diseases of the soul. Ibn al-Qayyim wrote that the foundational sins (أصول السيئات) are *kibr* (pride), *hirs* (greed), and *hasad* (envy). Pride was the sin of Iblis, and this sin lead him to *kufr* (disbelief). Greed leads to a myriad of other sins, and this was what made Adam عَلَيْهِ ٱلسَّلَامُ eat from the Forbidden Tree. And the sin of envy leads to injustice and usurping the rights of others, and this is why one of the children of Adam killed his brother (see *Al-Fawa'id*, p. 80, al-Mujamma' edition). The intense desire for the world and fierce competition over it are fueled by the *shuh* of our hearts.

Shuh and human nature

Shuh in Arabic refers to intense greed that leads to and includes *bukhl* (stinginess) and *hasad* (envy). What follows are some of the defining characteristics that will help us understand *shuh* better:

1. *Shuh* is a general quality that is part of our nature and it affects all behavior. The difference between *shuh* and stinginess is that a stingy person may be stingy in one or few areas of their personality (e.g. with money but not physical aid or advice). A person with *shuh* will be stingy with everything: they hate to benefit others with anything.
2. A stingy person will withhold what they own and not share it with others, like donating their own money. A person suffering from *shuh* will on top of that envy the good that others are enjoying and attempt to steal it away or at least wish for it to go away.
3. *Shuh* includes hating others for the good things they have in their lives, even if one suffers no personal loss or harm because of it.

Ibn Mas‘ud رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُ presents us with a definition for *shuh* in the following conversation:

> أتى رجل ابن مسعود فقال (إني أخاف أن أكون قد هلكت) قال (وما ذاك؟) قال (أسمع الله يقول ﴿وَمَنْ يوقَ شُحَّ نَفْسِهِ﴾ وأنا رجل شحيح لا يكاد يخرج من يدي شيء) قال (ليس ذاك بالشحّ الذي ذكر الله في القرآن إنما الشحّ أن تأكل مال أخيك ظلمًا ذلك البخل وبئس الشيء البخل)
>
> رواه الطبري في تفسيره (ج٢٣ ص٢٨٦ تحقيق شاكر).
>
> A man came to Ibn Mas‘ud and said: “I am afraid that I am done for.” He asked: “Why?” He replied: “I hear Allah saying ﴾And the one who is protected from the *shuh* of his

> self, it is they who are successful﴾, and I suffer from *shuh*, almost nothing leaves my hand." He said: "This is not the *shuh* that Allah mentioned in the Quran. *Shuh* is for you to unjustly devour the money of your brother. What you have is stinginess, and what a terrible thing it is."
>
> Reported by al-Tabari in his *Tafsir* (vol. 23, p. 286).

Tawus also said:

> قال طاووس (البُخْلُ أَنْ يَبْخَلَ الرَّجُلُ بِمَا فِي يَدَيْهِ وَالشُّحُّ أَنْ يُحِبَّ أَنْ يَكُوْنَ لَهُ مَا فِي أَيْدِي النَّاسِ)
>
> سير أعلام النبلاء (ج٥ ص٤٨).
>
> *Bukhl* (stinginess) is for one to withhold what is in his hand and *shuh* is for him to want what is in the hands of people.
>
> *Siyar A'lam al-Nubala'* (vol. 5, p. 48).

These definitions point to how *shuh* is built on greed and the desire to take what people have away from them. In some cases, one would wish that they would lose their possessions even if he gains nothing from it. Greed, envy, and stinginess are the ingredients of *shuh*.

Allah makes it known to us in the Quran that we have been created with this character in our hearts. Allah the Most Wise said:

وَأُحۡضِرَتِ ٱلۡأَنفُسُ ٱلشُّحَّۚ

And humans have been created with *shuh*.

Al-Nisa' (Q4:128)

The *ayah* literally means that *shuh* is always present with the soul, as if it's its companion. Allah reminds us of this fact in the *ayah* in the context of disputes that arise between spouses and during their reconciliation. Allah teaches in the *ayah* that reconciliation and reaching a settlement between the spouses is best. What stands in the way of such agreement, or even amicable separation, is *shuh*: the desire to receive all of our rights and dispense none or the least of our obligations. This *shuh* is present in all human hearts. The path to marital happiness is to rid the self of its *shuh*: to be content with some of our rights, not to demand all of them, and to try to fulfill all of our duties and responsibilities. This attitude softens the heart of the other person and they will in turn adopt this attitude with us. It is greed (i.e. demanding all but giving little) and competition that turns the household and the separation process into a piece of Hell. When we understand that this *shuh* is part of the nature of every spouse and mate we will ever have, we will realize that we cannot maintain the company of other human beings without sacrificing some of our needs and working hard to fulfill theirs.

The reason for our *shuh* is that we've been created weak and in need, and so we're in perpetual pursuit to fulfill our needs. When we pursue the world, which is finite by nature, we fear that the gains of others mean our loss. In addition, since the world cannot truly satisfy us, we keep competing for more of it, willing to take down anyone who stands in our way. We also possess the desire to outdo and outshine people around us, and so we hate to see them having what we don't. Because of all this, we wish to have more than anyone else or for them to lose what they have so they won't be better than us. The fact that we possess these qualities does not mean, however, that we cannot rise above them.

Allah describes the Ansar (the inhabitants of Madinah who gave aid to those who migrated to their land) as people who showed exemplary altruism and generosity. Allah the Most Merciful said:

وَٱلَّذِينَ تَبَوَّءُو ٱلدَّارَ وَٱلْإِيمَٰنَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ يُحِبُّونَ مَنْ هَاجَرَ
إِلَيْهِمْ وَلَا يَجِدُونَ فِى صُدُورِهِمْ حَاجَةً مِّمَّآ أُوتُوا۟ وَيُؤْثِرُونَ
عَلَىٰٓ أَنفُسِهِمْ وَلَوْ كَانَ بِهِمْ خَصَاصَةٌ ۚ وَمَن يُوقَ شُحَّ نَفْسِهِۦ
فَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلْمُفْلِحُونَ ٩

They love those who migrated to them and find no desire in their hearts for what the migrants have been given, but they favor others over themselves even if they themselves were in need. And the ones who are saved from the *shuh* of their selves are indeed the ones who are successful.

Al-Hashr (Q59:9)

The *iman* of the Ansar propelled them to put others before themselves, without any jealousy or greed. When the heart seeks its needs from Allah, it seeks it from the One who has everything and can supply it forever. The heart then does not have to ever worry about running out of what it needs or having to compete for it. This heart is then transformed from a poor heart and into a rich one. The rich and faithful hearts of the Ansar are content and do not envy or seek what others have. Rich hearts do not become annoyed by the favors that Allah has given to others. Allah predicates success in this world and the next on the defeat of this human *shuh*.

In another *ayah*, Allah repeats the link between curing *shuh* and success, as He commands us to spend for His sake. Allah the Most Generous said:

إِنَّمَآ أَمۡوَٰلُكُمۡ وَأَوۡلَٰدُكُمۡ
فِتۡنَةٞۚ وَٱللَّهُ عِندَهُۥٓ أَجۡرٌ عَظِيمٞ ١٥ فَٱتَّقُواْ ٱللَّهَ مَا ٱسۡتَطَعۡتُمۡ
وَٱسۡمَعُواْ وَأَطِيعُواْ وَأَنفِقُواْ خَيۡرٗا لِّأَنفُسِكُمۡۗ وَمَن يُوقَ
شُحَّ نَفۡسِهِۦ فَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلۡمُفۡلِحُونَ ١٦ إِن تُقۡرِضُواْ
ٱللَّهَ قَرۡضًا حَسَنٗا يُضَٰعِفۡهُ لَكُمۡ وَيَغۡفِرۡ لَكُمۡۚ وَٱللَّهُ شَكُورٌ
حَلِيمٌ ١٧ عَٰلِمُ ٱلۡغَيۡبِ وَٱلشَّهَٰدَةِ ٱلۡعَزِيزُ ٱلۡحَكِيمُ ١٨

> Indeed your wealth and children are but a test, and Allah has with Him great rewards. So, fear the punishment of Allah as much as you can, listen, obey, and spend, that is better for your selves. And the one who is protected from the *shuh* of themselves are the successful ones. If you lend Allah a good loan, He will multiply it for you and forgive you, and Allah is Thankful and Forgiving. He is the One who knows the seen and unseen, the Mighty and Wise.
>
> At-Taghabun (Q64:15–18)

In the midst of warning us about *shuh*, Allah prescribes treatment for it. Allah first explains that the worldly attractions, which we are so eager to keep, are a test for us: holding on to them could lead to our harm, and no sane person would hold on to what harms them. Once the Muslim who trusts Allah believes this, Allah calls on them to obey Allah and start spending in His cause. The increase in *iman* that comes from obeying Allah and developing a habit of spending, with all the joy and satisfaction that this brings, diminish the concern for this world and shrink the *shuh* of the hearts. And to complete the course of treatment, Allah reminds us humans, who are not so inclined towards generosity without some return, that whatever we spend is going to be multiplied with Allah. Such a promise, coming from the Wise, Thankful, Mighty, and Knowledgeable leaves the hearts comforted, secure, and reliant on Allah rather than the wealth they own in this life.

Shuh and iman

The character of *shuh* is one of the defining flaws of the hypocrites in the Quran. Allah says:

أَشِحَّةً عَلَيْكُمْ فَإِذَا جَآءَ ٱلْخَوْفُ رَأَيْتَهُمْ يَنظُرُونَ إِلَيْكَ تَدُورُ
أَعْيُنُهُمْ كَٱلَّذِى يُغْشَىٰ عَلَيْهِ مِنَ ٱلْمَوْتِ ۖ فَإِذَا ذَهَبَ ٱلْخَوْفُ
سَلَقُوكُم بِأَلْسِنَةٍ حِدَادٍ أَشِحَّةً عَلَى ٱلْخَيْرِ ۚ أُو۟لَـٰٓئِكَ لَمْ يُؤْمِنُوا۟
فَأَحْبَطَ ٱللَّهُ أَعْمَـٰلَهُمْ ۚ وَكَانَ ذَٰلِكَ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ يَسِيرًا ﴿١٩﴾

> They have *shuh* towards you. And when fear comes, you see them looking at you with their eyes revolving like one being overcome by death. But when fear departs, they lash you with sharp tongues, with *shuh* towards [any] good. Those have not believed, so Allah made their deeds worthless, and that is ever easy for Allah.
>
> Al-Ahzab (Q33:19)

The hypocrites hated the truth and the people who followed it. This hatred made them hate any Muslim success and to withhold their help and resources from them. On top of their failure to support Muslims and their constant let downs, they proceed to criticize without just cause. This attitude of the hypocrites is unfortunately mirrored by Muslims who hate the truth and its spread, fail to support it, and are content to simply be among its critics.

The Prophet ﷺ also taught us that *shuh* is a feature of the hypocrites and hypocrisy:

«إن الحياءَ والعفافَ والعِيَّ- عِيُّ اللسانِ لا عِيُّ القلب- والفقهَ من الإيمان وإنّهن يزدن في الآخرة ويَنْقُصْنَ من الدّنيا وما يزدن في الآخرة

> أكثرَ مما يَنْقُصْنَ من الدنيا وإن الشحَّ والفحشَ والبَذاءَ من النفاق وإنّهن يَنْقُصْنَ من الآخرة ويزدن في الدنيا وما يَنْقُصْنَ من الآخرة أكثرَ مما يزدن من الدنيا»
>
> رواه البيهقي في شعب الإيمان والطبراني في المعجم الكبير وصححه الألباني (السلسلة الصحيحة ٣٣٨١).
>
> «Indeed, shyness, decency, inarticulacy—the inarticulacy of the tongue not the heart [i.e. the heart's full comprehension]—and *fiqh* [deep understanding of Islam] are from *iman*. And they add to the Hereafter and decrease from the world, and what they add to the Hereafter is more than what they take from the world. And indeed, *shuh*, obscenity, and obscene speech are from hypocrisy. And they take away from the Hereafter and add to the world. And what they take away from the Hereafter is more than what they add to the world.»
>
> Reported by al-Bayhaqi and al-Tabarani and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*al-Silsilah al-Sahihah*, 3381).

Shuh and *iman* are opposites, and the more we have of one the less we will have of the other. *Shuh* is built on attachment to this world and *iman* on attachment to Allah and the next life. *Shuh* is built on hate, envy, aggression, and injustice; while *iman* is built on love, generosity, forgiveness, and justice. *Shuh* produces a miserly and irritable personality that demands without giving, but *iman* creates a peaceful soul that enjoys giving more than taking. The hypocrites are described in the Quran as having no or little faith in Allah's promises, and so are least inclined to spend, help others, or obey Allah; instead, they keep all what they have for themselves. As they hated to see the Muslims happy, the one afflicted with *shuh* is similarly jealous with the happiness and well-being of others. The one suffering from *shuh* is in constant pain and agitation.

The dangers of Shuh

But *shuh* is not only about harboring ill feelings or declining to do good; it also moves people to crime and mischief on this earth. The Prophet ﷺ said:

> «إِتَّقوا الشُّحَّ فَإِنَّ الشُّحَّ أهْلَكَ مَنْ كانَ قَبْلَكُمْ حَمَلَهُمْ عَلى أَنْ سَفَكوا دِماءَهُم وَاسْتَحَلُّوا مَحارِمَهُمْ»
>
> رواه مسلم (٢٥٧٨).
>
> «Beware of *shuh*, for it destroyed the people before you. It moved them to shed their each other's blood and violate their prohibitions.»
>
> Reported by Muslim (2578).

In a similar *hadith*, the Prophet ﷺ said:

> «إِيَّاكُمْ والشُّحَّ فَإِنَّما هَلَكَ مَنْ كانَ قَبْلَكُمْ بِالشُّحِّ أَمَرَهَمْ بِالْبُخْلِ فَبَخِلوا وَأَمَرَهُمْ بِالْقَطِيعَةِ فَقَطَعوا وِأَمَرَهُمْ بِالْفُجُورِ فَفَجَروا»
>
> رواه أبوداود (١٦٩٨) وصححه الألباني (صحيح أبي داود ١٦٩٨).
>
> «Beware of *shuh*, for the people before you were destroyed because of it. *Shuh* commanded them to be stingy, and they were; it commanded them to cut their family relations, and they did; and it commanded them to be immoral, and they were.»
>
> Reported by Abu Dawud (1698) and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih Abi Dawud*, 1698).

Shuh generates all of these vices when left untreated and allowed to fester. It leads to stinginess with wealth, help, and favors and devolves into covetousness. Unchecked greed breeds the desire to eliminate those who stand in our way, and this desire soon turns into reality. In fact, any sin that helps us get more of this world becomes acceptable, even desirable.

The prevalence of *shuh* that we see in the world today was predicted in a *hadith* as a sign of the worsening times as we approach the end of days. The Prophet ﷺ said:

> «يَتَقارَبُ الزَّمانُ ويَنْقُصُ الْعِلْمُ-وفي رِوايَةٍ الْعَمَلُ-وَيُلْقَى الشُّحُّ وَتَظْهَرُ الْفِتَنُ وَيَكْثُرُ الْهَرَجُ»
>
> رواه البخاري (٦٠٣٧) ومسلم (١٥٧).
>
> «Time will shrink, knowledge will decrease [in another narration, "actions will decrease"], *shuh* will be prevalent, tribulations will be prominent, and killings will be widespread.»
>
> Reported by al-Bukhari (6037) and Muslim (157).

These predictions are connected. The dearth of Islamic knowledge and its application decreases *iman*, and this in turn removes blessings from time, so it passes very quickly. *Shuh* rises as *iman* decreases, giving rise to rampant chaos and murder.

As the main *hadith* in this chapter confirms, *iman* is the opposite of *shuh*: as one increases, the other decreases. The one who has *shuh* in their heart is envious of others, unhappy with Allah's decree, and dissatisfied with how Allah has distributed wealth, talent, and good fortune among the people. The Prophet ﷺ said:

> «لا يَجْتَمِعَانِ فِي قَلْبِ عَبْدٍ الْإِيمَانُ وَالْحَسَدُ»
>
> رواه النسائي (٣١٠٩) وحسنه الألباني (صحيح النسائي ٣١٠٩).
>
> «Two things don't coexist in the heart of a human: *iman* and envy.»

Reported by al-Nasa'i and declared *hasan* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Nasa'i*, 3109).

Shuh contradicts loving Allah and His Prophet because it turns the heart towards this world, the self, and its needs. *Shuh* contravenes Ummah and community because it is selfish. It opposes many acts of Allah's obedience and leaves heart and body deprived of the blessings and peace of obeying Allah. *Shuh* calls for so many sins that it becomes a strongly destructive force, where murder is possible. This is why *shuh* cannot coexist with *iman*. And this is why it receives such strong condemnations in the *hadith*. We should seek Allah's protection from *shuh* as the Messenger ﷺ used to.

Treatment of shuh

Envy and greed are symptoms of the greater disease of having poor hearts. The cure to this poverty is both knowledge-based and action-based. The knowledge-based cure is to enrich the heart with knowing Allah and believing in His promises and guidance. When we believe that Allah destines all and grants according to His Divine Wisdom, we will not protest what He grants us. We will see in our provisions, Allah's Care and Mercy, where He selects for us what we need and is best for our hearts and souls. When we love and trust Allah, we won't look any further beyond what He plans for us.

The action-based cure involves the following:

Du'a

Asking Allah for his protection and guidance is one of the best ways to combat any disease of the heart. The Prophet ﷺ would often seek Allah's protection from *shuh*:

كَانَ رسولُ اللهِ صلى الله عليه وسلم يَتَعَوَّذُ مِنْ الشُّحِّ والْجُبْنِ وَفِتْنَةِ الصَّدْرِ
وَعَذابِ القَبْرِ.

رواه النسائي (٥٤٩٧) وصححه الألباني (صحيح النسائي ٥٤٩٧).

> The Messenger ﷺ used to seek Allah's protection from *shuh*, cowardice, the *fitnah* of the chest, and the punishment of the grave.
>
> Reported by al-Nasa'i (5497) and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Nasa'i*, 5497).

Note the coupling of *shuh* and cowardice, both lead to failure of helping and rescuing others. And note the coupling of the *fitnah* of the chest with the punishment of the grave, which are both internal pains that belie a serene exterior. The *fitnah* of the chest encompasses all the whispers of Shaytan, love of the world, the sins of the heart, its hardness, and its discomfort. This is a useful *du'a* to memorize and repeat.

The Sahabah realizing the danger of *shuh*, would ask for Allah's protection from it. The following story with Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Awf رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُ illustrates this point.

كنت أطوف بالبيت فرأيت رجلا يقول (اللهمّ قني شحّ نفسي) لا يزيد على ذلك. فقلت له فقال (إني إذا وقيت شح نفسي لم أسرق ولم أزن ولم أفعل شيئًا) وإذا الرجل عبد الرحمن بن عوف.

رواه الطبري في تفسيره (ج٢٣ ص٢٨٦ تحقيق شاكر).

> I was circling the Ka'bah and saw a man saying: "O Allah protect me from the *shuh* of myself," adding nothing to it. I asked him about this and he said: "If I am protected from my own *shuh*, I will not steal, fornicate, or do anything else." It turned out that the man was Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Awf.
>
> Reported by al-Tabari in his *Tafsir* (vol. 23, p. 286).

Giving

As the previously mentioned *ayahs* in *Surah At-Taghabun* (15–18) teach us, spending for the pleasure of Allah is the way to combat the selfish inclinations of the self. When one gives, they feel the sweetness of this generosity and it changes them on the inside. And when we remember the great rewards that await those who spend, giving becomes easier because in reality we are not losing anything. But giving is not restricted to wealth. Any type of help, physical or verbal, is recommended and it aids in freeing our hearts from the intense desire for this world.

Models

We need to surround ourselves physically and spiritually with people and examples that will help us transcend our weaknesses. They remind us of the greatness of Allah and living the pure life that He loves. These reminders will not fail to inspire us to get our priorities straight and change our behavior.

Read the following story of Abu Muslim al-Khawlani:

> قال عَطَاءٍ الخُرَاسَانِيِّ: (أَنَّ امْرَأَةَ أَبِي مُسْلِمٍ الخَوْلانِيِّ قَالَتْ ((لَيْسَ لَنَا دَقِيْقٌ)) فَقَالَ ((هَلْ عِنْدَكِ شَيْءٌ)) قَالَتْ ((دِرْهَمٌ بِعْنَا بِهِ غَزْلاً)) قَالَ ((ابْغِيْنِيْهِ وَهَاتِي الجِرَابَ)) فَدَخَلَ السُّوْقَ فَأَتَاهُ سَائِلٌ وَأَلَحَّ فَأَعْطَاهُ الدِّرْهَمَ وَمَلأَ الجِرَابَ نُشَارَةً مِنْ تُرَابٍ وَأَتَى وَقَلْبُهُ مَرْعُوْبٌ مِنْهَا وَذَهَبَ فَفَتَحَتْهُ فَإِذَا بِهِ دَقِيْقٌ حُوَّارَى فَعَجَنَتْ وَخَبَزَتْ فَلَمَّا جَاءَ لَيْلاً وَضَعَتْهُ فَقَالَ ((مِنْ أَيْنَ هَذَا)) قَالَتْ ((مِنَ الدَّقِيْقِ فَأَكَلَ وَبَكَى)))
>
> سير أعلام النبلاء (ج٤ ص١٢).

> ‘Ata’ al-Khurasani said: The wife of Abu Muslim said to him, “We have no flour.” So he asked her: “Do you have any money?” She replied: “I have a dirham from a yarn I spun.”

> He said: “Give it to me and give me the sack.” So he went to the market and a beggar came and persistently asked him for money, so he gave it to him. He then filled the sack with sand and came back home while his heart was terrified of her [i.e. of what she may say and do because he gave the money away] and then left. So she opened the sack and there was white flour in it. So she kneaded the dough, baked it, and served it at night. So he asked: “Where did you get this from?” She said: “From the flour.” So he ate and cried.
>
> *Siyar A‘lam al-Nubala’* (vol. 4, p. 12).

And if you want to read something amazing, consider the sacrifice of Ibrahim al-Taymi رَحِمَهُ ٱللَّهُ.

> طَلَبَ الحَجَّاجُ إِبْرَاهِيْمَ النَّخعِيَّ فَجاءَ الرَّسُوْلُ فَقَالَ أُرِيْدُ إِبْرَاهِيْمَ فَقَالَ إِبْرَاهِيْمُ التَّيْمِيُّ (أَنَا إِبْرَاهِيْمُ) وَلَمْ يَسْتَحِلَّ أَنْ يَدُلَّهُ عَلَى النَّخعِيِّ فَأَمَرَ بِحَبْسِهِ فِي الدِّيْمَاسِ وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُم ظِلٌّ مِنَ الشَّمْسِ وَلاَ كِنٌّ مِنَ البَرْدِ وَكَانَ كُلُّ اثْنَيْنِ فِي سِلْسِلَةٍ فَتَغَيَّرَ إِبْرَاهِيْمُ فَعَادَتْهُ أُمُّهُ فَلَمْ تَعْرِفْهُ حَتَّى كَلَّمَهَا فَمَاتَ فَرَأَى الحَجَّاجُ فِي نَوْمِهِ قَائِلاً يَقُوْلُ (مَاتَ فِي البَلَدِ اللَّيْلَةَ رَجُلٌ مِنْ أَهْلِ الجَنَّةِ) فَسَأَلَ فَقَالُوا مَاتَ فِي السِّجْنِ إِبْرَاهِيْمُ التَّيْمِيُّ فَقَالَ (حُلْمٌ نَزْغَةٌ مِنْ نَزَغَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ) وَأَمَرَ بِهِ فَأُلْقِيَ عَلَى الكُنَاسَةِ.
>
> سير أعلام النبلاء (ج٥ ص٦٢).
>
> Al-Hajjaj sought the capture of Ibrahim al-Nakaha‘i. So al-Hajjaj’s messenger came looking for him, and Ibrahim al-Taymi said: “I am Ibrahim,” and he did not deem it lawful to lead them to the whereabouts of al-Nakaha‘i. So al-Hajjaj ordered Ibrahim al-Taymi to be jailed underground, where they had no shade from the sun or protection from the

> cold, and each two prisoners were chained together. And his physical appearance changed so much that when his mother visited him she did not recognize him until he spoke to her. Then he passed away and al-Hajjaj saw in his dream someone saying: "Tonight, one of the people of Heaven passed away in the city." So he inquired and they informed him that Ibrahim al-Taymi died in jail. And he said: "This is a whisper from the whispers of Shaytan," and he ordered that Ibrahim al-Taymi be cast away in the garbage dump.
>
> *Siyar A'lam al-Nubala'* (vol. 5, p. 62).

All of our sacrifices pale in comparison to what this great man did.

HADITH THIRTEEN

الحديث الثالث عشر

Arrogance and the heart

قالَ رسول الله ﷺ: «لا يَدْخُلُ الْجَنَّةَ مَنْ كانَ فِي قَلْبِهِ مِثْقالُ ذَرَّةٍ مِنْ كِبْرٍ» قَالَ رَجُلٌ (إِنَّ الرَّجُلَ يُحِبُّ أَنْ يَكُونَ ثَوْبُهُ حَسَنًا وَنَعْلُهُ حَسَنَةً) قَالَ «إِنَّ اللهَ جَمِيلٌ يُحِبُّ الْجَمَالَ الْكِبْرُ بَطْرُ الْحَقِّ وَغَمْطُ النَّاسِ»

رواه مسلم (٩١).

The Messenger ﷺ said: «The one who has an ant's weight of arrogance in their heart shall not enter Paradise.» A man said: "Indeed, one loves his clothes and his shoes to be nice." He said: «Allah is Beautiful and loves beautification. Arrogance is the rejection of the truth and the belittling of people.»

Reported by Muslim (91).

Commentary

There are foundational or cardinal diseases of the heart, and *kibr* (arrogance and pride) is one of them. This grave sin reflects serious flaws in our souls and relationship with Allah, and it leads to a host of other great sins. Anyone worried about their fate in the next life and their well-being in this one must understand the problem with *kibr* and how to protect themselves from it.

Iman and kibr

Arrogance and pride stand as a barrier between us and the truth. When our sense of self is inflated, and we exaggerate our grandeur, we see that everything and everyone else is beneath us, undeserving of us. Our sense of superiority leads us to believe that we possess what no one has, and we put our self before and above everything and everyone else. This flawed perception opens the door to so many other sins, and it blocks the path to so many virtues. The arrogant cannot love for others what they love for themselves, cannot be humble, and cannot be free of envy and hatred. The arrogant will covet, backbite, spread gossip, and will say and do whatever to maintain their false superiority. The arrogant fail to accept advice or admit their mistakes and so fail to reform and improve. And they reject the truth that they receive from others, especially when it doesn't suite their taste. *Kibr* is a disease that is fatal to *iman*. Ibn Taymiyyah said:

> قال ابن تيمية: (ومعصيةُ الكِبْر والعُجْب والرياء أعظمُ من معصية شُرْب
> الخمر فالشارب الخاشع الخائف من ربه أقرب إلى رحمة ربه من
> الصائم المتكبِّر المُعْجَب المُرائي فمن ظنَّ أن الطاعة صُوَر الأعمال فهو
> جاهل بل اسم الطاعة يتناول طاعة القلب بالخوف والرجاء والإخلاص
> لله والشكر وغير ذلك أعظم مما يتناول طاعةَ البدن كالصيام والقيام
> والصدقة)
>
> الرد على الشاذلي (ص٦٥).
>
> The sin of pride and self-admiration and showing-off is greater than the sin of drinking alcohol. The one who drinks alcohol and is afraid of His Lord is closer to the mercy of his Lord than the arrogant and self-admiring fasting person who is showing off. The one who thinks that the obedience of Allah is the

> mere external act of the deed is ignorant. Obedience refers to the obedience of the heart with fear and hope and sincerity to Allah and thankfulness and other things, more than it refers to the obedience of the body, such as fasting, night prayer, and charity.
>
> *Al-Radd 'Ala al-Shadhili* (p. 65).

The arrogant compromises the essence of worship, even if it looks perfect externally. Worship is to approach Allah with humility. Arrogance ruins the heart and hollows out our worship, leaving it an empty shell of physical performance. Mutarrif ibn Abdullah said:

قَالَ مُطَرِّفُ بنُ عَبْدِ اللهِ: (لأَنْ أَبِيْتَ نَائِماً وَأُصْبِحَ نَادِماً أَحَبُّ إِلَيَّ مِنْ
أَنْ أَبِيْتَ قَائِماً وَأُصْبِحَ مُعْجَباً)

سير أعلام النبلاء (ج٤ ص١٩٠).

> That I spend the night asleep and be sorry in the morning is more beloved to me than to spend the night praying and admire myself in the morning.
>
> *Siyar A'lam al-Nubala'* (vol. 4, p. 190).

The one who has a humble and regretful heart puts his trust in the forgiveness and mercy of Allah, and is completely reliant on Allah to save him. This is the heart that Allah loves. The one who admires his work puts his trust in them, and his heart is distant from Allah; he has failed to extract the real benefit from his worship.

Heaven is not the abode of the proud, but Hell is. When Iblis showed his arrogance and refused Allah's direct command, Allah told him that there would be no place for him in Heaven with that type of rebellion.

قَالَ مَا مَنَعَكَ أَلَّا تَسۡجُدَ إِذۡ أَمَرۡتُكَۖ قَالَ أَنَا۠ خَيۡرٞ مِّنۡهُ خَلَقۡتَنِي مِن نَّارٖ
وَخَلَقۡتَهُۥ مِن طِينٖ ﴿١٢﴾ قَالَ فَٱهۡبِطۡ مِنۡهَا فَمَا يَكُونُ لَكَ أَن تَتَكَبَّرَ
فِيهَا فَٱخۡرُجۡ إِنَّكَ مِنَ ٱلصَّٰغِرِينَ ﴿١٣﴾

> Allah said: "What prevented you from prostrating when I commanded you?" Iblis said: "I am better than him. You created me from fire and created him from clay." Allah said: "Descend from Paradise, for it is not for you to be arrogant in it, so leave. Indeed, you are of the debased."
>
> Al-Aʿraf (Q7:12–13)

Note how his arrogance and feelings of superiority made him lose his high station and all the honor and privileges he used to enjoy; he, instead, became the lowliest creature. This is what arrogance brings: it distances us from every virtue we have and casts us into anger, resentment, and rebellion against Allah. And on the Last Day, the haughty will receive great humiliation as the Prophet ﷺ foretold:

«يُحشَرُ المتكَبِّرونَ يومَ القيامةِ أمثالَ الذَّرِّ في صُوَرِ الرِّجالِ يغشاهمُ الذُّلُّ من كلِّ مَكانٍ»

رواه الترمذي (٢٤٩٢) وحسنه الألباني (صحيح الترمذي ٢٤٩٢).

> «The arrogant will be gathered on the Day of Judgment the size of ants in human form, with humiliation coming to them from every direction.»
>
> Reported by al-Tirmidhi (2492) and declared *hasan* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Tirmidhi*, 2492).

As pride casts one out of Heaven, so it casts guidance from the heart. Allah says while talking about Pharaoh:

ٱلَّذِينَ يُجَٰدِلُونَ فِيٓ ءَايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ بِغَيۡرِ سُلۡطَٰنٍ أَتَىٰهُمۡۖ
كَبُرَ مَقۡتًا عِندَ ٱللَّهِ وَعِندَ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْۚ كَذَٰلِكَ
يَطۡبَعُ ٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ قَلۡبِ مُتَكَبِّرٖ جَبَّارٖ ٣٥

Those who dispute the *ayat* of Allah without any authority that has come to them, this is extremely hateful to Allah and to those who believe. So does Allah seal up the heart of every arrogant, tyrant.

Ghafir (Q40:35)

This is the natural outcome of anyone who lets pride inhabit his heart. Allah says:

سَأَصۡرِفُ عَنۡ ءَايَٰتِيَ ٱلَّذِينَ يَتَكَبَّرُونَ
فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ بِغَيۡرِ ٱلۡحَقِّ

I will turn away from My *ayat* those
who are arrogant upon the earth without right.

Al-A‘raf (Q7:146)

Iman is the antidote to *kibr*. It is through *iman* that we understand who Allah is and who we truly are. We see through it the contrast between the greatness of Allah and our own weakness and helplessness, and we then submit to Allah's Wisdom and Power. Because of it, we focus on our own faults and weaknesses and are humbled by the great qualities we note in people around us. The knowledge the faithful have, their application of it, and their proximity to Allah drives pride away. But they must guard their heart at all times from arrogance and self-admiration sneaking back and ruining their intentions.

Rejecting the truth and despising people

Pride lives in the heart and soul but produces discernible signs and attitudes that announce it. The *hadith* points to these products of arrogance to help in its identification and treatment. Furthermore, by understanding what the signs of arrogance are, we can distinguish between arrogance and other permissible feelings and acts.

The first and most dangerous product of arrogance is rejecting the truth that comes from Allah and feeling superior to it. Yet this outward rejection conceals an internal recognition of the truth. Allah said:

وَجَحَدُوا۟ بِهَا وَٱسْتَيْقَنَتْهَآ أَنفُسُهُمْ ظُلْمًا وَعُلُوًّا ۚ

And they rejected them [Allah's signs]—though their own selves
were certain of them—out of transgression and haughtiness.
Al-Naml (Q27:14)

The rejection of the truth could be major or complete, leading to *kufr* (disbelief), or it could be minor or partial, leading to disobedience of Allah that falls short of *kufr*. In the second case, the presence of arrogance in the heart is a major sin. Unless forgiven by Allah or countered with good deeds, this sin can send us to Hell. Only when we are purified from it would we be able to join the rest of the believers in Heaven.

It is important that we always check our hearts and monitor them for arrogance so that we don't reject the Quran and Sunnah. It is easy to drift into the sea of pride and start refusing individual rulings and statements simply because they don't agree with our intellect and emotions. Allah the Most Wise says:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يُجَـٰدِلُونَ فِىٓ ءَايَـٰتِ ٱللَّهِ بِغَيْرِ سُلْطَـٰنٍ أَتَىٰهُمْ
إِن فِى صُدُورِهِمْ إِلَّا كِبْرٌ مَّا هُم بِبَـٰلِغِيهِ ۚ فَٱسْتَعِذْ
بِٱللَّهِ ۖ إِنَّهُۥ هُوَ ٱلسَّمِيعُ ٱلْبَصِيرُ ﴿٥٦﴾

Indeed, those who dispute the *ayat* of Allah without having

> any authority [from Allah] with them, there is only pride in their chests, which will fail to reach its goals [i.e. won't be able to overcome the truth]. So seek refuge in Allah, for He is the Hearing, the Seeing.
>
> Ghafir (Q40:56)

> قال أبو عثمان الصابوني: (ما ترك أحد شيئًا من السنة إلا لكبر في نفسه)
>
> اقتضاء الصراط المستقيم مخالفة أصحاب الجحيم (ج٢ ص١٢٠).
>
> No one leaves something from the Sunnah except because of arrogance in his soul.
>
> *Iqtida' al-Sirat al-Mustaqim* (vol. 2, p. 120).

The next time we hesitate to accept the truth from the Quran and Sunnah, we should ask ourselves if this may be due to our own personal pride standing in the way of our submission to Allah.

The second product of arrogance is to look down at people because, we believe, we are better than them. This happens when we compare ourselves to them and conclude that we have what they don't. Our haughtiness may be fueled by superior knowledge, degrees, skills, wealth, worship, or lineage. It could also be based on our imagination, where we make up faults for others or exaggerate them and inflate our own virtues or fabricate some. The one guilty of this crime must remember the *hadith* of this chapter and that, because of this disease, he may be the worst of people and not their best. And what benefit are all of these things we feel so proud of when they put us in Hellfire and we see the people we despised above us in Heaven. Read with an open heart this *hadith* from the Messenger ﷺ about those who are proud of their lineage:

> «لينتَهينَّ أقوامٌ يفتخِرونَ بآبائِهمُ الَّذينَ ماتوا إنَّما هم فَحمُ جَهنَّمَ أو

> ليَكونُنَّ أهْونَ علَى اللهِ مِن الجُعْلِ الَّذي يُدَهدِهُ الخِراءَ بأنفِهِ إنَّ اللَّهَ أذهبَ عنكُم عُبِّيَّةَ الجاهليَّةِ وفخرَها بالآباءِ إنَّما هوَ مؤمنٌ تقيٌّ أوَ فاجرٌ شقيٌّ النَّاسُ كلُّهم بنو آدمَ وآدمُ خُلِقَ مِن ترابٍ»
>
> رواه الترمذي (٣٩٥٥) وحسنه الألباني (صحيح الترمذي ٣٩٥٥).
>
> «Either the people who are boasting about their deceased forefathers, who are but the charcoal of Hellfire, are going to stop or they will be more insignificant with Allah than the dung beetle that rolls dung with its nose. Allah has removed from you the arrogance of Jahiliyyah and its boasting of its forefathers. One is either a pious believer or a miserable rebellious sinner. Humans are all the children of Adam and Adam came from sand.»
>
> Reported by al-Tirmidhi (3955) and declared *hasan* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Tirmidhi*, 3955).

Boasting is likened to small beetles rolling dung with their noses. The work may seem very significant to the beetle, but it is very repulsive and lowly to those who observe it. Similarly, the one who boasts about worldly matters to put others down demeans himself with Allah.

Arrogance can emanate from the religious when they admire their own knowledge and worship and despise others for their ignorance and disobedience. Anyone who desires to be close to Allah must remember that arrogance will kill their sincerity and ruin their deeds. If we are infected with arrogance, we belong to the same category of sinners and ignorants that we often scorn, and must throw ourselves under the Mercy of Allah to save us from this disease. There is also reverse arrogance from the non-religious when they look at some devout practices and accuse the devout of hypocrisy, irrelevance, or superficiality. This is also very serious and will likely be as detrimental as arrogance from the religious, if not more so. Our guilt and shame of not practicing the truth must not turn us into haters of it. We put a great distance between us and Allah when we hate someone or something that He loves. As far as we are concerned, we should always believe that it is us who need to improve and that Allah may love the ones we despise more than He loves us.

When we find our religious knowledge failing to cleanse us from *kibr*, we must question what we are learning and how. It is either that we are preoccupied with knowledge that is not treating our heart, and so we should switch to one that does, or that we are pursuing it for corrupt and worldly goals and thus failing to learn from it. The example of the first is one who dives into minute and complex details of *fiqh*, *aqidah*, or the study of *hadith* and neglects the treatment of his heart by failing to follow the Quran and Sunnah. The example of the second is one who studies the Quran and Sunnah to know more, and maybe so it be said that he/she is knowledgeable or to argue better, but is not concerned with the fruit and the application of this knowledge.

Allah is beautiful and loves beauty

The question the Companion asked about the reality of arrogance allowed the Prophet ﷺ to clarify what qualifies as arrogance. Arrogance is not the desire that humans have to possess beautiful and nice things, even if they should desire that no one surpasses them. The following *hadith* explains this:

أَتَى رَجُلٌ النَّبيَّ صلَّى اللَّهُ علَيهِ وسلَّمَ وَكانَ رجلًا جميلًا فقالَ (يا رسولَ اللَّهِ إنِّي رجلٌ حُبِّبَ إليَّ الجمالُ وأُعطيتُ منهُ ما ترَى حتَّى ما أحبُّ أن يفوقَني أحدٌ إمَّا قالَ بشراكِ نَعلي وإمَّا قالَ بشِسْعِ نَعلي أفمِنَ الكِبرِ ذلِكَ؟) قالَ «لا ولَكِنَّ الكِبرَ مَن بطرَ الحقَّ وغمطَ النَّاسَ»

رواه أبو داود (٤٠٩٢) وصححه الألباني (صحيح أبو داود ٤٠٩٢).

> A man came to the Prophet ﷺ, and he was a handsome man, and said: “O Messenger of Allah, I am a man that loves beauty and I have been given what you see of it so that I don’t like that anyone would have more than I do, even if it were the string or he said the strap of my sandal. Is this arrogance?” He replied: «No. Arrogance is the rejection of the truth and the belittling of people.»
>
> Reported by Abu Dawud (4092) and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih Abi Dawud*, 4092).

Loving to have more than others is the desire to be superior, and it is an arrogant and bad intent. The Companion, however, did not desire superiority but simply hated others to be superior; he did not hate equality of beauty and affluence. This person loved the best for all, and our hearts will be their happiest if we feel the same.

The Prophet ﷺ explained that Allah is Beautiful: He is beautiful in Himself, beautiful in His Names and Attributes, and beautiful in His Actions. All the beauty that we see around us in the world is a reminder of the incredible beauty of its Creator. Allah loves beauty and beautification. Our internal beauty with *iman* and *taqwa* is the most important type of beauty to desire and work for. Though external beauty and beautification has its place in Islam and human life, it remains secondary and inferior to the internal beauty of our hearts and souls.

Our desire to have nice clothes and shoes is not an element of arrogance. Allah does not wish for us, and does not love, that we look ugly on purpose or wear tattered, ragged clothes out of choice. Indeed, Allah loves to see His blessings on us reflected and manifested in our lives. The Prophet ﷺ said:

> «إِنَّ اللهَ يُحِبُّ أَنْ يَرَى أَثَرَ نِعْمَتِهِ عَلَى عَبْدِهِ»
>
> رواه الترمذي (٢٨١٩) وحسنه وصححه الألباني (صحيح الترمذي ٢٨١٩).
>
> «Allah loves to see the impact of His bounty on His slave.»

Reported by al-Tirmidhi and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Tirmidhi*, 2819).

«إذا آتاك اللهُ مالًا فلْيُرَ عليك فإنَّ اللهَ يحبُّ أن يَرى أثرَه على عبدِه حسنًا ولا يُحبُّ البُؤسَ ولا التَّباؤُسَ»

رواه البخاري في التاريخ الكبير والطبراني في المعجم الكبير وحسنه الألباني (صحيح الجامع ٢٥٥).

«If Allah gives you money, let Him see that on you, for Allah loves to see on His slave the good impact of what He grants, and He hates showing need or exaggerating it.»

Reported by al-Bukhari in *al-Tarikh al-Kabir* and al-Tabarani and declared *hasan* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Jami'*, 255).

This does not mean, however, that we should launch into the pursuit of extravagance. Modesty in all of our affairs is best: it keeps us grounded and promotes our *iman*. The Prophet ﷺ said:

«البَذَاذَةُ مِنَ الْإِيمَانِ»

رواه أبوداود (٤١٦١) وصححه ابن حجر والألباني (صحيح أبي داود ٤١٦١).

«Avoiding luxury is from *iman*.»

Reported by Abu Dawud and declared *sahih* by Ibn Hajar and al-Albani (*Sahih Abi Dawud*, 4161).

The best way is the middle way between forced asceticism and reveling in luxury. One can choose their clothes based on two intentions that the last two *hadiths* teach: to wear humble attire with the intention of modesty or wear nice clothes to reflect Allah's favors. Both of these are intentions that Allah loves, and one can move between them based on the occasion and the status of their heart. If the heart is leaning towards pride or is very susceptible to it, one should lean towards more modest clothes. At other times when the heart is not proud and desires to enjoy the beauty that Allah blessed it with, it is praiseworthy to enjoy what Allah gave as long as we don't overindulge or overspend. The context and surroundings also determine what we wear and why. We can reject expensive clothes in solidarity with the people around us who cannot afford them, or we can wear good clothes to match our surroundings and not stand out. But pursuing beauty to elevate ourselves above others is sinful. Pursuing beauty, on the other hand, to show the favors of Allah and because Allah loves it is a good intention and deed.

Treatment of kibr

The treatment of *kibr* takes place internally (knowledge-based) and externally (action-based). For the external part, we should seek to engage in activities that chase away pride from our hearts. We see the example of this in one *hadith* narrated by the Companion Jubayr ibn Mut'im. He رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُ said:

> قال جُبَيْرُ بن مُطْعِم: (يَقُولُونَ فِيَّ التَّيهُ وَقَدْ رَكِبْتُ الْحِمَارَ وَلَبِسْتُ الشَّمْلَةَ وَقَدْ حَلَبْتُ الشَّاةَ وَقَدْ قَالَ رَسولُ اللهِ صلى الله عليه وسلم «مَنْ فَعَلَ هذا فَلَيْسَ فِيهِ مِنَ الْكِبْرِ شَيْءٌ»
>
> رواه الترمذي (٢٠٠١) والحاكم (٧٣٧٣) وصححه الألباني (صحيح الترمذي ٢٠٠١).
>
> They say that I am arrogant but I rode the donkey, wore the wool sarong, and milked the sheep. And the Messenger ﷺ said: «The one who does this has no arrogance left in him.»
>
> Reported by al-Tirmidhi (2001) and al-Hakim (7373) and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Tirmidhi*, 2001).

The three acts the Companion described represent three aspects of human life and activity: the ride, the dress, and labor. The donkey is a humble ride, similar today to driving an inexpensive car or an old cheap one. Similarly, wool is modest clothing that stands in contrast to the flashiness of expensive designs and brands. Many in the world today dress to attract attention and admiration, basing their self-image and worth on the reactions they receive. And milking sheep is the type of manual labor that many, especially the arrogant, would consider to be beneath them. Acts of this nature strip away layers of arrogance and shield us from expectations, admiring gazes, and flattery. When we are liberated from people's praise—which tends to inflate our egos—we are free to concentrate more on our true self and enjoy the beauty of the simple life. Abdullah ibn Salam, the Companion, also engaged in physical menial tasks to tame his ego:

> عن عبد الله بن سلام رضي الله عنه أَنَّه مَرَّ في السوقِ وعليه حُزْمَةٌ مِنْ حطَبٍ فقيلَ لَهُ ما يَحْمِلُكَ على هذا وقد أَغْناكَ الله عَنْ هذا قال أَرَدْتُ أَنْ أَدْمَغَ الكِبْرَ سمِعْتُ رسولَ الله صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يقولُ لا يدخلُ الجنَّةَ مَنْ في قلْبِهِ خَرْدَلَةٌ مِنْ كِبْرٍ.
>
> رواه عبدالله بن أحمد في الزهد والطبراني وصححه الألباني (صحيح الترغيب ٢٩١٢).
>
> Once Abdullah ibn Salam entered the market with a bundle of wood on his back, so he was asked: "Why do you do this when Allah had enriched you beyond the need to do this?" He replied: "I wanted to destroy arrogance. I heard the Prophet ﷺ say the one who has a mustard's seed worth of arrogance shall not enter Paradise."
>
> Reported by Abdullah ibn Ahmad in *al-Zuhd* and al-Tabarani and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Targhib*, 2912).

We should constantly examine our thoughts and intentions to see if what we are doing and saying is still for Allah or for the sake of self-elevation. Ubaydullah ibn Abi Ja'far said:

> قال عُبَيْدَ اللهِ بنَ أَبِي جَعْفَرٍ: (إِذَا كَانَ المَرْءُ يُحَدِّثُ فِي مَجْلِسٍ فَأَعْجَبَه الحَدِيْثُ فَلْيُمْسِكْ وَإِذَا كَانَ سَاكِتاً فَأَعْجَبَه السُّكُوتُ فَلْيَتَحَدَّثْ)
>
> سير أعلام النبلاء (ج٦ ص١٠).
>
> If one is speaking to a gathering and he admires what he says, let him stop. And if he is silent and admires his silence, let him speak.
>
> *Siyar A'lam al-Nubala'* (vol. 6, p. 10).

Similarly, al-Fudayl said:

> سَمِعْتُ الفُضَيْلَ يَقُوْلُ: (إِنِ اسْتَطَعْتَ أَنْ لاَ تَكُوْنَ مُحَدِّثاً وَلاَ قَارِئاً وَلاَ مُتَكَلِّماً إِنْ كُنْتَ بَلِيْغاً قَالُوا ((مَا أَبْلَغَهُ وَأَحْسَنَ حَدِيْثَه وَأَحْسَنَ صَوْتَه)) فَيُعجِبُكَ ذَلِكَ فَتَنْتَفِخَ وَإِنْ لَمْ تَكُنْ بَلِيْغاً وَلاَ حَسَنَ الصَّوتِ قَالُوا ((لَيْسَ يُحْسِنُ يُحَدِّثُ وَلَيْسَ صَوْتُهُ بِحَسَنٍ)) أَحزَنَكَ ذَلِكَ وَشقَّ عَلَيْك فَتكُوْنَ مُرَائِياً وَإِذَا جَلَسْتَ فَتَكَلَّمْتَ فَلَمْ تُبَالِ مَنْ ذَمَّكَ وَمَنْ مَدَحَكَ فَتَكَلَّمْ)
>
> سير أعلام النبلاء (ج٨ ص٤٣٣)
>
> If you can, don't be a *muhaddith* [one who narrates *hadith*], a [public] reader, or a speaker. If you are eloquent, they will say: "How eloquent he is and how sweet his talk is and how beautiful his voice is," and you will like this and puff up. And if you are not eloquent and your voice is not beautiful they will say: "He cannot talk well and his voice is not beautiful," and you will be sad because of it and it will be difficult for you and so you will be showing off. But if you sit and speak while not paying attention to who criticizes you or praises you, then speak.

> *Siyar A'lam al-Nubala'* (vol. 8, p. 433).

When we meet people, the first thought that comes to our mind should not be that we are better than them. We should not automatically search for their weaknesses and compare it to our strengths. Instead, we should believe that everyone has something that we don't, and so, in one way or another, is better. Al-Hasan said:

> قال الحسن: (التواضع أن تخرجَ من بيتك فلا ترى مسلما إلا رأيت له فضلا عليك)
>
> منهاج القاصدين لابن الجوزي (ج٢ ص٨٩٩).
>
> Humility is for you to leave your home and believe that every Muslim you see is better than you.
>
> *Minhaj al-Qasidin* by Ibn al-Jawzi (vol. 2, p. 899).

Any Muslim that we meet must have at least one good quality that he is better at than we are. And if we cannot find any, we should say: "He has some good that I do not know about." When we meet different people and interact with them, we won't fail to note how they could be superior to us. Bakr ibn Abdullah said:

> قال بكر بن عبد الله: (إذا رأيت من هو أكبر منك فقل هذا سبقني بالإيمان والعمل الصالح فهو خير مني وإذا رأيت من هو أصغر منك فقل سبقته إلى الذنوب والمعاصي فهو خير مني وإذا رأيت إخوانك يكرمونك ويعظمونك فقل هذا فضل أخذوا به وإذا رأيت منهم تقصيراً فقل هذا ذنب أحدثته)
>
> منهاج القاصدين لابن الجوزي (ج٢ ص٨٩٩).
>
> If you see someone who is older than you, say that he has preceded me with *iman* and good deeds, so he is better than I

> am. And if you see someone younger than you, say that I have preceded him with sins and disobedience, so he is better than I am. And if you see your brothers honoring you and respecting you, say that this is a virtuous act that they are practicing. And if you see nonfeasance and neglect from them, say that this is because of a sin I did.
>
> *Minhaj al-Qasidin* by Ibn al-Jawzi (vol. 2, p. 899).

Moderation, without exaggeration

But we also should not take these humbling acts to an extreme. There were a group of Muslims, called the Malamatiyyah, who sought to expose their mistakes or fake some to receive public censure. They believed that the blame they will receive and the loss of public esteem will help rid the self of pride; it will block it from working for praise and worldly status, which it has lost, but instead for Allah's pleasure. Others believed that humbling the self must involve demeaning acts, like spending extended times sitting in and eating from the garbage dump to tame the arrogance of the soul. These all are examples of purification attempts—though may be well-intentioned—that deviate from the example and guidance of the Prophet ﷺ. The Prophet, as the best example and teacher of self-purification, never advocated or resorted to such extreme methods. Muslims are commanded to hide their mistakes and not publicize them. When one goes public with them, they would be helping to normalize and spread these sins in society. When one humiliates himself to an extreme, they move from combating pride to tolerating indignity and dishonor. Though the Companions رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ were humble, they were also honorable humans who did not accept demeaning words, acts, or lifestyles.

HADITH FOURTEEN

الحديث الرابع عشر

The thankful heart

قالَ رسول الله ﷺ: «قَلْبٌ شَاكِرٌ و لِسانٌ ذاكِرٌ و زَوْجَةٌ صالِحَةٌ تُعينُكَ على أَمْرِ دُنْياكَ و دينِكَ خَيْرُ ما اكْتَنَزَ النَّاسُ»

رواه البيهقي في شعب الإيمان (٤١١٦) وصححه الألباني (صحيح الجامع ٤٤٠٩) و عند الترمذي (٣٠٩٤) عن ثوبان قال: لمَّا نزلت وَالَّذِينَ يَكْنِزُونَ الذَّهَبَ وَالْفِضَّةَ قالَ كنَّا معَ رسول اللَّه ﷺ في بعضِ أسفارِهِ فقالَ بعضُ أصحابِهِ أُنزلَ في الذَّهبِ والفضَّةِ لو علمنا أيُّ المالِ خيرٌ فنتَّخذَهُ فقالَ: (أفضلُهُ لسانٌ ذاكِرٌ وقلبٌ شاكِرٌ وزوجةٌ مؤمنةٌ تُعينُهُ على إيمانِهِ). حسَّنه الترمذي والسيوطي وابن حجر وصححه الألباني (صحيح الترمذي ٣٠٩٤).

The Messenger ﷺ said: «A thankful heart, a tongue that remembers Allah, and a pious woman that helps you in your worldly and religious matters are the best things that people treasure.»

Reported by al-Bayhaqi in *Shu'ab al-Iman* (4116) and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Jami'*, 4409).

Al-Tirmidhi (3094) reports from Thawban who said: "When the *ayah* ﴿and those who treasure gold and silver﴾ was revealed, we were with Prophet in one of his travels. Some of his Companions said: 'This was revealed about gold and silver. We wish to know the best wealth so we can own it.' He said: «Its best is a tongue that remembers Allah, a thankful heart, and a wife with *iman* that helps him with his *iman*.»

Declared *hasan* by al-Tirmidhi, al-Suyuti, and Ibn Hajar. Declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Tirmidhi*, 3094).

Commentary

We are gatherers on this earth. We spend our life collecting—even hoarding—the most expensive and beautiful things we can get our hands on. With self-aggrandizement as the goal, humans spend their life searching for personal gain and advancement. Among all the possibilities and of all the objects we could seek and collect, the *hadith* directs us to the most valuable and precious treasures on this earth.

Worldly treasure

Humans have a strong attraction to worldly wealth: they fight over it, collect it, and are reluctant to spend it. Our pursuit of wealth continues to escalate until it consumes our entire life. We put it before family, friends, and even our own health; and most sadly, we put it before Allah and our life in the next world. Those who hoard wealth and do not spend it in what Allah loves believe that they are benefiting themselves by holding back. But they are doing the worst thing they can to themselves. Allah says:

هَٰٓأَنتُمۡ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ تُدۡعَوۡنَ لِتُنفِقُواْ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ فَمِنكُم مَّن يَبۡخَلُۖ
وَمَن يَبۡخَلۡ فَإِنَّمَا يَبۡخَلُ عَن نَّفۡسِهِۦۚ وَٱللَّهُ ٱلۡغَنِيُّ وَأَنتُمُ ٱلۡفُقَرَآءُۚ

Here you are invited to spend in the cause of Allah, but among
you are those who are stingy. And whoever is stingy is only stingy
with himself; and Allah is the Rich, while you are the poor.
Muhammad (Q47:38)

The one who holds back is depriving himself in reality. He is denying himself the reward from Allah, the higher ranks in Jannah, the cleansing power of spending, and the opportunity to heal his heart. Allah in the Quran explains that this selfish and greedy lifestyle will be met with punishment in the next life:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓا۟ إِنَّ كَثِيرًا مِّنَ ٱلْأَحْبَارِ وَٱلرُّهْبَانِ
لَيَأْكُلُونَ أَمْوَٰلَ ٱلنَّاسِ بِٱلْبَٰطِلِ وَيَصُدُّونَ عَن سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ ۗ وَٱلَّذِينَ
يَكْنِزُونَ ٱلذَّهَبَ وَٱلْفِضَّةَ وَلَا يُنفِقُونَهَا فِى سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ
فَبَشِّرْهُم بِعَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ ﴿٣٤﴾ يَوْمَ يُحْمَىٰ عَلَيْهَا فِى نَارِ جَهَنَّمَ
فَتُكْوَىٰ بِهَا جِبَاهُهُمْ وَجُنُوبُهُمْ وَظُهُورُهُمْ ۖ هَٰذَا
مَا كَنَزْتُمْ لِأَنفُسِكُمْ فَذُوقُوا۟ مَا كُنتُمْ تَكْنِزُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

And those who hoard gold and silver and don't spend it in the way of Allah—give them news of a painful punishment. On the Day when their wealth will be heated in the fire of Hell and their foreheads, their flanks, and their backs will be seared with it. [It will be said]: "This is what you hoarded for yourselves, so taste what you used to hoard."

Al-Tawbah (Q9:34–35)

It's ironic that the things we love and trust so much can in reality be the things that hurt us the most. Insightfully, Ibn Kathir commented on this *ayah* that the one who loves something and ends up putting it ahead of Allah's obedience will be punished by it.

Another *ayah* describes another punishment. Allah the Most Generous says:

وَلَا يَحْسَبَنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يَبْخَلُونَ بِمَآ ءَاتَىٰهُمُ ٱللَّهُ مِن فَضْلِهِۦ هُوَ خَيْرًا لَّهُم ۖ
بَلْ هُوَ شَرٌّ لَّهُمْ ۖ سَيُطَوَّقُونَ مَا بَخِلُوا۟ بِهِۦ يَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ ۗ

And let not those who withhold what Allah has given them of His bounty ever think that it is better for them. Rather, it is worse for them. Their necks will be encircled by what they withheld on the Day of Resurrection.

Al Imran (Q3:180)

Commenting on this *ayah*, the Prophet ﷺ explained what this will look like on that day:

> «من آتاه الله مالا فلم يؤد زكاته مُثِّلَ له ماله شُجاعا أقرعَ له زبيبتان يُطَوَّقُهُ يومَ القيامة يأخذ بِلِهْزِمَتَيْهِ – يعني بشدقيه – يقول (أنا مالك أناكنزك) ثم تلا هذه الآية ﴿ولا يحسبن الذين يبخلون بما آتاهم الله من فضله﴾ إلى آخر الآية»
>
> رواه البخاري (٤٥٦٥).
>
> «The one whom Allah has given wealth and does not give its *Zakah*, then his wealth on the Day of Resurrection will be made into a white-headed poisonous snake with two black dots above its eyes. The snake will encircle his neck and bite his cheeks and say: "I am your money, I am your treasure." Then he recited the *ayah*: ﴾And let not those who withhold what Allah has given them of His bounty…﴿ to the end of the *ayah*.»
>
> Reported by al-Bukhari (4565).

This is the reality of unspent wealth and greed. Like that snake in the *hadith*—which is the most venomous and aggressive species of snakes—greed injects its poison into our life and kills our *iman*. We love our money and want to be so close to it, and on that day it will come so close that it will wrap around our necks and sink its teeth into our face. What we think is bringing us security and comfort may be the reason for our distress and pain.

But this pain is not restricted to the Hereafter; it is a source of punishment in this life too. When we are misers with our wealth, our relationship with family and friends suffer and we lose them. The less generous we are, the lonelier we will be. Our societies also unravel as tensions between rich and poor mount. Unless we spend as Allah commanded us, we will stand alone in a society that has turned against itself.

The *hadith* explains that in lieu of gold and silver, and everything we buy, there are more valuable and lasting things to look for in this life. These things will not only bring us happiness in this life, but more importantly are what will lead us to permanent happiness in the next.

What is significantly insightful in the *hadith* is the Prophet's ﷺ understanding of human nature. We tend to observe what other people are doing and what they are interested in, and this influences and changes our own perceptions and priorities. When we see people competing and running after this life, it sparks the desire in us to do the same thing. We tend to follow the crowd wherever they go, believing that they are on to something. In the *hadith*, the Prophet ﷺ is redirecting this competitive spark and asking us not to blindly follow the crowd. If you want to compete, put your effort into the most valuable and lofty, not in what has beguiled the masses. According to al-Hasan al-Basri:

> قال الحسن رحمه الله: (إِذَا رَأَيْتَ الرَّجُلَ يُنَافِسُكَ فِي الدُّنْيَا فَنَافِسْهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ)
>
> الزهد لابن أبي الدنيا (ص٢٢٩).
>
> When you see someone competing with you over this life, compete with him over the Hereafter.
>
> *Al-Zuhd* by Ibn Abi al-Dunya (p. 229).

The three things the *hadith* lists are the things to truly treasure on this earth. And they are all connected.

Thankful heart

The first and most important thing to seek in this life is a thankful heart. It is a heart that is full of *iman* and trust in Allah, and so is always grateful. No matter what it goes through, it sees in it the care, the guidance, and love that Allah has for it. The Prophet ﷺ said:

> «عجبًا لأمرِ المؤمنِ إنَّ أمرَه كلَّه خيرٌ وليس ذاك لأحدٍ إلا للمؤمنِ إن أصابته سَرَّاءُ شكرَ فكان خيرًا له وإن أصابته ضَرَّاءُ صبر فكان خيرًا له»
>
> رواه مسلم (٢٩٩٩).
>
> «How incredible the affair of the believer is, for everything he faces is good for him, and this is solely for the believer. If he meets some happiness, he is thankful and this is good for him. And if he meets some adversity, he is patient and this is good for him.»
>
> Reported by Muslim (2999).

Everything that the believers face is good for them. And this should bring great relief to the heart of every Muslim: to know that as long as they hold on to their *iman* and what it entails, nothing truly bad is going to happen to them. They begin to see in every adversity an opportunity to be closer to Allah. They understand that Allah is the Most Generous and that He did not deny something or take it away except that He wanted what's best for them. Umar ibn al-Khattab رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُ said:

> قَالَ عُمَرُ بْنُ الْخَطَّابِ: (مَا أُبَالِي عَلَى أَيِّ حَالٍ أَصْبَحْتُ عَلَى مَا أُحِبُّ أَوْ عَلَى مَا أَكْرَهُ لِأَنِّي لَا أَدْرِي الْخَيْرُ فِيمَا أُحِبُّ أَوْ فِيمَا أَكْرَهُ)
>
> رواه ابن أبي الدنيا في الرضا عن الله بقضائه (ص٦٥)
>
> I don't care what state I will be in when I wake up, whether it is something I love or hate, because I do not know whether good lies in what I love or what I hate.
>
> Reported by Ibn Abi al-Dunya in *al-Rida 'An Allah* (p. 65).

These hearts trust Allah's judgment and decision more than they trust themselves and their own judgments. Ibn Umar رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا said:

قال ابْنَ عُمَر: (إِنَّ الرَّجُلَ لَيَسْتَخِيرُ اللَّهَ فَيَخْتَارُ لَهُ فَيَتَسَخَّطُ عَلَى رَبِّهِ فَلَا يَلْبَثُ أَنْ يَنْظُرَ فِي الْعَاقِبَةِ فَإِذَا هُوَ قَدْ خِيرَ لَهُ)

رواه ابن أبي الدنيا في الرضا عن الله بقضائه (ص٨٣).

Indeed one would ask Allah to choose for him what's best and Allah chooses for him and he becomes upset with His Rabb. Then he soon sees the outcome and finds that it was best for him.

Reported by Ibn Abi al-Dunya in *al-Rida 'An Allah* (p. 83).

Ibn Mas'ud also said:

قَالَ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ ابن مسعود: (إِنَّ الرَّجُلَ لَيُشْرِفُ عَلَى الْأَمْرِ مِنَ التِّجَارَةِ أَوِ الْإِمَارَةِ حَتَّى يرى أَنَّهُ قَدْ قَدَرَ عَلَيْهِ ذَكَرَهُ اللَّهُ فَوْقَ سَبْعِ سَمَوَاتٍ فَيَقُولُ لِلْمَلَكِ ((اذْهَبْ فَاصْرِفْ عَنْ عَبْدِي هَذَا فَإِنِّي إِنْ أُيَسِّرْهُ لَهُ أُدْخِلْهُ جَهَنَّمَ)) فَيَجِيءُ الْمَلَكُ فَيَعُوقُهُ فَيُصْرَفُ عَنْهُ فَيَظَلُّ يَتَطَيَّرُ بِجِيرَانِهِ ((إِنَّهُ دَهَانِي فُلَانٌ سَبَقَنِي فُلَانٌ)) وَمَا صَرَفَهُ عَنْهُ إِلَّا اللَّهُ)

رواه ابن أبي الدنيا في الرضا عن الله بقضائه (ص٨٤).

One would be close to getting a business deal or a leadership position and sees that it is already in his grasp, then Allah mentions him from above seven skies and says to the angel: "Go and take away this from my slave, for if I give it to him, I will take him to Jahannam." So the angel comes and stops him and he loses his objective. So he starts thinking that his neighbors brought him bad luck and saying: "This person outsmarted me, this person was quicker than me," and it is only Allah that took it away from him.

Reported by Ibn Abi al-Dunya in *al-Rida 'An Allah* (p. 83).

These hearts understand that everything that comes from Allah is beautiful. The good and the bad come from the same source. Ibrahim al-Taymi said:

> قال إِبْرَاهِيمَ التَّيْمِيِّ: (إِنْ لَمْ يَكُنْ لَنَا خَيْرٌ فِيمَا نَكْرَهُ لَمْ يَكُنْ لَنَا خَيْرٌ فِيمَا نُحِبُّ)
>
> رواه ابن أبي الدنيا في الفرج بعد الشدة (ص٣٦).
>
> If there is no good for us in what we hate, there would be no good for us in what we love.
>
> Reported by Ibn Abi al-Dunya in *al-Faraj Baʿda al-Shiddah* (p. 36).

This is extremely insightful and layered. If we mistrust the judgment of Allah when he sends us something we hate, how can we trust the goodness of what we love when He sends it to us? We see repeatedly in our lives that some of the things we desired were harmful and toxic: our judgment is flawed. The thankful heart trusts Allah more than its limited experience. On another level, this saying explains that the heart that is unable to see the benefit in what it hates and to extract it from it will similarly be blind to the benefit of what it loves.

The thankful heart abandons its desire in favor of the desire and decision of its Creator. When it does not get what it wants, it wants what Allah gave it. Ayyub al-Sukhtayani said:

> قال أيوب السختياني: (إذا لم يكن ما تريد فأرد ما يكون)
>
> صفة الصفوة (ج٢ ص١٧٤).
>
> If what you want does not happen, then want what happens.
>
> *Sifat al-Safwah* (vol. 2, p. 174).

One of the people who best exemplifies this thankfulness to Allah no matter what happens was Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz رَحِمَهُ ٱللَّهُ.

> لَمَّا هَلَكَ عَبْدُ الْمَلِكِ بْنُ عُمَرَ بْنِ عَبْدِ الْعَزِيزِ وَسَهْلُ بْنُ عَبْدِ الْعَزِيزِ وَمُزَاحِمُ مَوْلَى عُمَرَ فِي أَيَّامٍ مُتَتَابِعَةٍ دَخَلَ عَلَيْهِ الرَّبِيعُ بْنُ سَبْرَةَ فَقَالَ (عَظَّمَ اللَّهُ أَجْرَكَ يَا أَمِيرَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ فَمَا رَأَيْتُ أَحَدًا أُصِيبَ بِأَعْظَمَ مِنْ مُصِيبَتِكَ فِي أَيَّامٍ مُتَتَابِعَةٍ وَاللَّهِ مَا رَأَيْتُ مِثْلَ ابْنِكَ ابْنًا وَلَا مِثْلَ أَخِيكَ أَخًا وَلَا مِثْلَ مَوْلَاكَ مَوْلًى) قَطُّ فَطَأْطَأَ رَأْسَهُ فَقَالَ لِي رَجُلٌ مَعَهُ عَلَى الْوِسَادِ (لَقَدْ هَيَّجْتَ عَلَيْهِ) قَالَ ثُمَّ رَفَعَ رَأْسَهُ فَقَالَ (كَيْفَ قُلْتَ لِى يَا رَبِيعُ؟) فَأَعَدْتُ عَلَيْهِ مَا قُلْتُ أَوَّلًا فَقَال (لَا وَالَّذِي قَضَى عَلَيْهِ أَوْ قَالَ عَلَيْهِمُ الْمَوْتَ مَا أُحِبُّ أَنَّ شَيْئًا كَانَ مِنْ ذَلِكَ لَمْ يَكُنْ)
>
> رواه ابن أبي الدنيا في الرضا عن الله (ص١٠٣).
>
> When Abdul Malik son of Umar ibn Abdul Aziz, and Sahl ibn Abdul Aziz, and his servant Muzahim passed away in a span of few days, al-Rabi‘ ibn Sabrah said to him: “May Allah increase your reward O Prince of the believers. I have not seen anyone tested like you in few consecutive days. By Allah, I did not see a son like yours, a brother like yours, or a servant like yours.” So Umar lowered his head, and a person sitting next to me said: “You have renewed his pain and sorrow.” Then he raised his head and said: “Repeat what you said to me.” So I did, and he replied: “No, I swear by the One who decreed death upon them, I do not love that any of that did not happen.”
>
> Reported by Ibn Abi al-Dunya in *al-Rida ‘An Allah* (p. 103).

The thankful heart sees in every pain they feel the removal of sin, the granting of reward, and the rise of levels in Jannah. Ibn ‘Uyaynah said:

> قَالَ ابْنُ عُيَيْنَةَ: (مَا يَكْرَهُ الْعَبْدُ خَيْرٌ لَهُ مِمَّا يُحِبُّ لِأَنَّ مَا يَكْرَهُهُ يَهِيجُهُ عَلَى الدُّعَاءِ وَمَا يُحِبُّ يُلْهِيهِ عَنْهُ)

> رواه ابن أبي الدنيا في الفرج بعد الشدة (ص٤١).
>
> What the human hates is better for him than what he loves because what he hates moves him to pray [*du'a*] and what he loves distracts him from it.
>
> Reported by Ibn Abi al-Dunya in *al-Faraj Ba'da al-Shiddah* (p. 41).

They understand that any loss in this life will be turned into gains on the Day of Judgment and in Jannah. It is in Heaven where we will get everything we wished for on this earth and more, where we will be united with loved ones we lost, and where Allah will bless us with an unimaginable life that will erase the memory of any pain we experienced. So in reality, there is no loss but only blessings from Allah on this earth. Consequently, the believer is not a glass-half-empty person or even a glass-half-full person. For the believer and only for the believer, the glass is completely full because every loss is in reality a gain.

This does not mean that the believer will stop feeling pain; it is human to experience pain, sorrow, and anxiety. But the believer quickly moves from these feelings and noticing the magnitude of his loss to noticing instead the favors of Allah upon him in this test. And when he sees these blessings, he thanks Allah for the test that brought these blessings and starts feeling better. This realization mollifies the pain and its impact. So even though the believer still experiences pain, the duration of this feeling is shorter and its impact smaller.

For the heart to be thankful, it must recognize the many blessings Allah bestows on it, that we are inundated by the blessings of Allah every second of our life. When the heart contemplates these blessings, it finds delight and happiness in how great Allah was to it and in how He continues to be Great, Generous, Caring, and Merciful. The heart witnesses through these blessings that Allah was taking care of us well before we were conscious of Him, and He continues to guide our steps and arrange our affairs, even without us realizing or asking for it. We consequently comprehend that we are eternally unable to thank Allah for what He gives us. The heart then opens up to its Creator with love and gratitude, content with Allah's choices, and happy to be a slave of Allah. It desires to be closer to Allah, the source of these blessings and its joy, and its main wish becomes what pleases Allah. And when it reaches that, it does not matter to it what it has lost of this world. It is recorded that the Prophet ﷺ said:

«إن لم يَكُن بِكَ غضبٌ عليَّ فلا أبالي»

حديث مرسل، والمرسل من أقسام الضعيف، إلا أن معناه صحيح.

> «If you are not angry with me, then I don't care about anything else.»
>
> A *mursal* weak *hadith* but its meaning is sound.

If you are happy with me, My Rabb, then everything else pales and disappears in comparison.

The thankful heart is not resentful about what it does not have or upset with what others have because its concerns have traveled from this world to the next. It sees everything around it as temporary constructions that shouldn't distract it. Worldly glamor resembles crumbs that do not satisfy its yearning for the eternity of the next life, the depth of meaning that Allah gives to our existence. This heart has migrated to Heaven and is waiting for its body to join it. This thankful heart is the greatest blessing we can pray for in this life.

I conclude this section with a wise saying from Yahya ibn Mu'adh:

قال يحيى ابن معاذ: (إذا كنت لا ترضى عن الله كيف تسأله الرضا عنك)

صفة الصفوة (ج٢ ص٢٩٣).

> If you are unhappy with Allah, how can you ask him to be happy with you?

> *Sifat al-Safwah* (vol. 2, p. 293).

If we are dissatisfied with Allah's decisions and commands, despite His infinite Wisdom and Mercy, how can we expect Him to look at us with any satisfaction?

Remembering tongue

There is a link between the three treasures that the Prophet ﷺ listed. The thankful heart leads to a remembering tongue and vice versa. When one remembers Allah with their tongue, Allah will be on their mind and in their heart. Shaytan flees from them, and his plots will be foiled. Their perspective on life and assessment of happenings changes as they remember Allah. When they encounter *haram* and seek Allah's refuge from Shaytan, they remind themselves to avoid it and not to tolerate it or be near it. All this keeps their *iman* strong. When worldly extravagance and attractions are about to steal their hearts, they say:

لَبَّيْكَ لَا عَيْشَ إِلَّا عَيْشَ الْآخِرَة

> I am on your obedience [or your pleasure is my intent O Allah], true living is the living of the Hereafter.

This is what the Prophet ﷺ said to bring humility to his heart:

قَالَ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ وَهُوَ فِي رَحْلٍ لَهُ «لَبَّيْكَ لَا عَيْشَ إِلَّا عَيْشَ الْآخِرَة فَاغْفِرْ لِلْأَنْصَارِ وَالْمُهَاجِرَة» تَوَاضُعًا فِي رَحْلِهِ.

رواه أحمد في المسند (١٣٢٥٨) وقال محققوه إسناده قوي.

> The Prophet ﷺ once said while he was in his home: «I am on your obedience [or your pleasure is my intent O Allah], true living is the living of the Hereafter, so forgive the Ansar and the Muhajirun» out of humility in his home.
>
> Reported by Ahmad in *al-Musnad* (13258) and its editors said that its chain is strong.

When we ask Allah for forgiveness, we realize that we have a Forgiving Creator that loves to pardon us as soon as we turn back to Him, and we will be more inclined to come back to Him. This also moves us to focus our attention on mending our ways and fixing our mistakes rather than worldly distractions. The more we glorify Allah, the more we remember His greatness and love and fear Him. The more we say *alhamdulillah*, the more we remember the blessings of Allah and feel content with Allah's decrees. When our tongues are engaged in remembering Allah, they shun the repetition of obscenities and vice, and flow instead with dulcet words that comfort the listener. The remembrance of Allah deposits peace and joy into the hearts, a pleasure that nothing else can bring, because they connect us to Allah. The more that we remember Allah, the purer our hearts and minds will be and the closer we will be to Allah.

In a *hadith* similar to the main *hadith* of this chapter, the Prophet ﷺ recommends us a *du'a* that we should hold on to when we see others running and fighting over this world. When you see them competing for the *dunya*, meet their competition with this *du'a*:

> «يا شداد بن أوسٍ إذا رأيت الناس قد اكتنزوا الذهب والفضة فأكثر هؤلاءِ الكلمات (اللهم إني أسألك الثبات في الأمرِ والعزيمة على الرُّشد وأسألك موجبات رحمتك وعزائم مغفرتك وأسألك شكر نعمتِك وحسن عبادتك وأسألك قلباً سليماً ولساناً صادقاً وأسألك من خير ما تعلم وأعوذُ بك من شرِّ ما تعلم وأستغفرُك لما تعلمُ إنك أنت علامُ الغيوب)»
>
> رواه الطبراني وابن عساكر وقال الألباني إسناده جيد ورجاله ثقات (السلسلة الصحيحة ٣٢٢٨).
>
> «O Shaddad ibn Aws, if you see people are treasuring gold and silver, then frequently repeat these sentences: "O Allah I ask you for steadfastness in this matter, and I ask You for the

> resolve to adhere to the path of guidance, and I ask you for what causes your mercy and brings your forgiveness, and I ask You that I be thankful for Your blessings and to worship You well, and I ask You for a sound heart and a truthful tongue, and I ask You for the good of what You know, and I seek refuge with You from the evil of what You know, and I ask You for forgiveness of what You know, for You are the Knower of the Unseen."»
>
> Reported by al-Tabarani and Ibn ʿAsakir and al-Albani said that its chain is good and its narrators are trustworthy (*al-Silsilah al-Sahihah*, 3228).

This comprehensive *duʿa* includes the benefits of this life and the next. This should be part of the *dhikr* that we memorize and repeat.

Pious wife

The last of the three treasures is the pious wife. She is her husband's best companion and friend. She supports him in worldly and religious matters, nurtures his *iman*, and reminds him of Allah when he forgets.

The Prophet ﷺ informed us of the value and importance of the company we keep and friends we mingle with when he said:

> «الرجلُ على دينِ خليلِه فلينظرْ أحدُكم من يُخالِلُ»
>
> رواه أبو داود (٤٨٣٣) والترمذي (٢٣٧٨) وحسنه الألباني (صحيح أبي داود
> ٤٨٣٣).
>
> «The man will follow the religion of his close friend, so let each of you consider who he is taking as a close friend.»
>
> Reported by Abu Dawud (4833) and al-Tirmidhi (2378) and declared *hasan* by al-Albani (*Sahih Abi Dawud*, 4833).

Of all the companions we will have, our wives are the closest and most influential. Their companionship spells the difference between a peaceful, productive, and faith-filled life and a wayward and restless existence. This is why it is important to choose the companion that will help you reach Allah and not become an obstacle in your journey to Him. The Prophet ﷺ said:

«الدُّنيا متاعٌ وخيرُ متاعِ الدُّنيا المرأةُ الصَّالحةُ»

رواه مسلم (١٤٦٧)

> «The world is a provision [of the Hereafter]. And the best of the provision of the world is the pious woman.»
>
> Reported by Muslim (1467).

This world is supposed to be used as an aid to reach Allah. And the best help we can receive in this world comes from this pious woman. She makes his path to Allah easier, not harder. She counsels him when he needs advice, and comforts him when he is anxious and in pain. She keeps his secrets and hides his mistakes. According to the following *hadith*, she sacrifices to make Allah happy:

«أَلَا أخبرُكم بنسائِكُم في الجنَّةِ؟» قُلنَا (بلَى يا رسولَ اللهِ) قالَ (كُلُّ ودودٍ وَلودٍ إذا غَضِبتْ أو أُسيَءَ إليهَا أو غضِبَ زوجُها قالتْ (هذهِ يدِي في يدِكَ لا أكتحِلُ بغَمضٍ حتَّى تَرضَى))»

رواه الطبراني في المعجم الوسط وقال عنه الألباني حسن لغيره (صحيح الترغيب ١٩٤١).

> «Shall I not tell you about your women in Paradise?» They said: “Yes, O Messenger of Allah.” He said: «Every loving and birthing woman. When she gets angry, or is wronged, or her husband gets angry she says: “This is my hand in your hand, my eyes will not be adorned with sleep until you are happy.”»
>
> Reported by al-Tabarani and al-Albani declared it *hasan lighayrih* (*Sahih al-Targhib*, 1941).

This noble character and compromise on behalf of this wise and loving woman keeps the home an oasis of happiness and *iman*; she puts Allah and the happiness of her family before personal feelings and gain, and for that she deserves Paradise. Naturally, men should also exhibit nobility of character and lean towards forgiveness and compromise. It is unrealistic for us to put the entire burden on our mates and expect model behavior from them while we are destroying what they are trying to build.

It is important to remember that not all of us get the chance to marry, and not all marriages last. Among those that do last, not all marriages are ideal or come close to the beautiful picture the Prophet ﷺ painted. Whatever our situation may be, we shouldn't turn this mate, or future mate, into this savior that will completely change our lives, and whom we will blame if it doesn't. We should remember that having a thankful heart and tongue is in our own hands. The one who puts the entire burden of their well-being on another abdicates their role in their own transformation and fantasizes instead about a mate who will magically make their life better. We can pray to Allah to have this person in our life but we cannot delay our *iman* until they arrive or lose it if they leave.

HADITH FIFTEEN

الحديث الخامس عشر

The heart and Allah's forgiveness

قالَ رسول الله ﷺ: «ينزلُ اللَّهُ ليلةَ النِّصفِ مِن شعبانَ إلى السَّماءِ الدُّنيا فيغفرُ لِكُلِّ نفسٍ إلَّا إنسانٍ في قَلبِهِ شحناءٌ أو مُشرِكٍ باللَّهِ عزَّ وجلَّ»

رواه ابن أبي عاصم في كتاب السنة (٥٠٩) وصححه الألباني في تخريج كتاب السنة.

The Messenger ﷺ said: «Allah descends on the night of the middle of Sha'ban to the lowest sky and forgives each soul except one who has enmity in their heart or one with shirk in Allah the Most High.»

Reported by Ibn Abi 'Asim in *Kitab al-Sunnah* (509) and declared *sahih* by al-Albani in *Takhrij Kitab al-Sunnah*.

Commentary

Our heart is the most important element of our religious life, and the state it is in is the most defining one when it comes to our relationship with Allah. When the heart is well, it not only ennobles the rest of the body but it brings it closest to the Mercy and Forgiveness of Allah. In this *hadith*, we see how the condition of our heart is the cause for receiving forgiveness from Allah. It can also stand in the way of that forgiveness to delay it or permanently block it. The one that desires the forgiveness and love of its Creator must pay attention to how their heart is doing.

The Middle of Sha‘ban

The *hadith* explains that the Middle of Sha‘ban is a special night. Many Muslims, however, celebrate this night with special worship, *dhikr*, and food based on very weak or fabricated *hadiths* and inauthentic practices, passed on as religious custom without investigation and discernment. Other than what the *hadith* in this chapter states, nothing else is authentically reported from the Prophet ﷺ about the virtues of the night of the Middle of Sha‘ban or special worship in it. It is always best to adhere to the Prophet's Sunnah and not deviate from it through additions or deletions. Focusing on the inauthentic detracts from the attention and energy we need to focus on the authentic path of Islam.

Allah the Most High descends to the lowest sky on that night. This divine descent is one of the attributes of Allah that Muslims ought to believe in as the Prophet ﷺ reported without distortion or resemblance. We believe it to be a true attribute of Allah, not figurative or allegorical speech, but without imagining or discussing how this happens or looks like. Allah's Majesty lies beyond resembling any of his creation. We leave the how to Allah and believe in the reality of the Prophetic statement.

The night of the Middle of Sha‘ban is a night when Allah comes closer to His creation. In another *hadith*, the Prophet ﷺ states that Allah takes a special look at his creation:

> «يَطَّلِعُ الله إلى خَلْقِه فِي لَيْلَةِ النِّصف مِنْ شَعْبَانَ فيَغْفِرُ لِجَمِيعِ خَلْقِهِ إلا لُمشْرِكٍ أو مُشَاحِنٍ»
>
> أخرجه ابن حبان والبيهقي في شعب الإيمان وصححه الألباني (السلسلة الصحيحة ١١٤٤).
>
> «Allah looks at his creation on the night of the Middle of Sha‘ban and forgives all of His creation except for one with *shirk* or enmity.»

Reported by Ibn Hibban and al-Bayhaqi in *Shu'ab al-Iman* and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*al-Silsilah al-Sahihah*, 1144).

The Middle of Sha'ban is landmark as we approach the month of Ramadan. The Prophet ﷺ said:

«إذا انتصف شعبان فلا تصوموا»

رواه أبو داود (٢٣٣٧) والترمذي (٧٣٨) وصححه الألباني (صحيح أبي داود ٢٣٣٧).

«When it is the Middle of Sha'ban, stop fasting.»

Reported by Abu Dawud (2337) and al-Tirmidhi (738) and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih Abi Dawud*, 2337).

The *hadith* is taken to mean that those who did not initiate fasting in the first part of the month of Sha'ban should not initiate it in the second half. The Middle of Sha'ban acts as a turning point in approaching the month of Ramadan. It is perhaps this juncture and relation to Ramadan that may interpret why that night is a night of forgiveness. Allah wants us to prepare for the advent of the great month of Ramadan by cleansing our hearts from the two impediments to His forgiveness. When we do, we will be able to receive the blessings of the month of Ramadan with clean and open hearts.

Shirk in Allah

Every heart needs a master. Like a ship needs a captain, a country needing a leader, and a company's reliance on a CEO, the heart seeks one at its helm to guide its operations, answer its questions, and remove its fears. As these entities and collectives cannot function with multiple and competing leaders, so would the heart fail with multiple masters. Shirk is the occupation of the heart by a false master that competes for its love, fear, attention, and devotion. The presence of this false master in the heart ruins it. It ruins it because the demands that this master puts on the heart contradict the demands of its true Master: Allah. Allah says in the Quran:

لَوۡ كَانَ فِيهِمَآ ءَالِهَةٌ إِلَّا ٱللَّهُ لَفَسَدَتَاۚ فَسُبۡحَٰنَ ٱللَّهِ رَبِّ ٱلۡعَرۡشِ
عَمَّا يَصِفُونَ ٢٢

Had there been within the Heavens and earth gods worshiped
besides Allah, they both would have been ruined.
Al-Anbiya' (Q21:22)

Allah points in this *ayah* to one of the proofs of his Oneness. He explains that if hypothetically there were to be more than one god, this world would lose its order and fall into chaos and corruption. Allah, the All-Knowing, lets us know that each of these gods would have a different worldly plan and execution, and these would conflict with the other gods' designs. With each trying to assume control of this earth and imposing their will—and one of the essential attribute of God is that His Power is complete and unopposed—the earth will be the scene for conflict, contradiction, and disorder. The fact that this world operates smoothly and with such impeccable order testifies to the fact that its Master and Sustainer is only one.

If this is true for the macrocosm (i.e. the universe), it is also true for the microcosm: the heart. Different objects of worship that settle in the heart corrupt it because each leads to a different path and end. Each *ilah* (what we worship) puts its own requirements on the heart: it seeks to be loved, valued, and respected the most. Each *ilah* is the giver of meaning and answers, and these answers don't harmonize with what another *ilah* supplies. Each *ilah* provides or is part of a complete world view, a world of meaning different from the other *ilah*. To imagine that a heart could combine all of these contradictions and still be well and sound is dreaming of the impossible.

But even when the heart settles on a single *ilah*, other than Allah, this choice will corrupt it. It is like choosing an incompetent and careless president or CEO. It may even be akin to choosing a leader intent on harming the organization. What this *ilah* will command and ask is in itself corrupt. Allah explains that desires and plans that emanate away from Allah are harmful by their nature, in this life and the next. Allah says:

وَلَوِ ٱتَّبَعَ ٱلْحَقُّ أَهْوَآءَهُمْ لَفَسَدَتِ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتُ وَٱلْأَرْضُ وَمَن فِيهِنَّ ۚ

But if Allah were to follow their inclinations and desires, the
Heavens and the earth and whoever is in them
would have been ruined.
Al-Mu'minun (Q23:71)

It is not only that these desires are contradictory, but they are also fraught with selfishness, lack of insight, foolishness, and injustice. Listening to this false master brings the heart a lot of pain and agony, many failures, and a lot of disappointments. It leads it down dark roads and then leaves it to its misery.

But it is not only about what this *ilah* commands. It is also about what it can give. The heart adopts an *ilah*, and it must adopt one, because it needs it. It cannot live without it. The heart needs to love someone completely. And in the absence of Allah, it will seek inferior loves, and move from one lover to another looking for that love that gives it comfort and peace. Each love affair with an inferior lover becomes an episode of pain and disappointment. Each new worldly gain, thought to be the highest goal of life, appears unconvincing, leaving us to ask: what does this mean and what was it for? The heart needs an *ilah* to trust, to give it the answers it needs to explain its existence and fate, to know that it can rely on it, save it, guide it, and bless it. Each shelter we seek with a false *ilah* soon exposes its own weakness: its answers, the trust that we give to it, and the help we expect and receive from it leave us in pain and greater confusion.

The one who does not take Allah as His master will seek another. The one who does not accept Allah's answers will seek answers elsewhere and accept them. The one who does not love Allah will keep looking for this missing love in everything around them. The one who does not fear Allah will fear everything around him. ‘Amir ibn Abdiqays said:

> قال عامر بن عبد قيس: (من خاف الله أخاف الله منه كل شيء ومن
> لم يخف الله أخافه الله من كل شيء)
> صفة الصفوة (ج٢ ص١٢٢).
>
> If one fears Allah, Allah will make everything afraid of him. And if one is not afraid of Allah, Allah will make him afraid of everything.
>
> *Sifat al-Safwah* (vol. 2, p. 122).

The one who does not accept the Prophet ﷺ as the infallible conveyor of truth will accept another without question. The one who does not seek the comfort of their heart from Allah will seek it from someone/something else. The one who does not chase away their anxiety with the remembrance of Allah will scramble to remember something else and move closer to it, except that this alternative will fail to rescue him.

Ask yourself: where does your heart get its comfort from? Whom does it seek when it is anxious and in pain? Whom does it want to talk to when it is in distress? What is the thing that brings it most joy and happiness? The answers to these admittedly difficult questions will tell you where your heart is at. It will tell you who the master of your heart is. It will tell you what it values the most, beyond the lies we tell ourselves. It will tell us if Allah is our true *ilah* or if our hearts are suffering under the weight of multiple masters.

Enmity

The second cause of deprivation of Allah's forgiveness is the heart's hatred and enmity. The word *shahna'* has two underlying meanings that explain the nature of this problem. The first meaning is to be full, like a full ship or container. The second meaning is to be distant. When there is *shahna'* in the heart, the heart is so full with hatred, anger, and ill-feelings that there is now a great distance between two individuals. They don't speak to each other, they don't even greet when they meet, and they actively avoid each other. Their friendship has turned into hostility; their kinship has soured into resentment and anger. They feel betrayed and wronged, and they cannot get past all the indignation.

The danger of *shahna'* is all the evil it leads to and the good it deprives of and destroys. A heart filled with anger and trapped in the perceived injustices of the past cannot receive satisfaction until it harms the object of its hate in one way or another. This anger fuels suspicious thoughts, believing the worst about others, backbiting, gossip, lying, and deception. We see examples of people who were very close, and then a conflict or a misunderstanding moved them to broadcast each other's secrets and spread rumors to assail their reputations. The distance between the two and lack of communication compound the hurt and hate. The hatred then mounts and develops into physical assault, theft, and murder. This enmity when left untreated will lead to all types of evil and destructive acts.

This hatred also shuts the door on much good in our life. We must not forget that Islam has a very strong social component to it. The religion of Islam is built on two primary types of relationships that we need to take care of: our relationship with Allah and with other people. Our religion would not be complete and we would not be right with Allah until we fulfill the obligations of both. *Shirk* is the defect in our relationship with Allah, and *shahna'* is the defect in our relationship with other people. With *shahna'* in the heart, we wouldn't be able to fulfill many of our obligations before Allah. We are asked, for example, to be kind and close to our kin, to be especially merciful and kind to our parents and elders. We are asked to greet everyone we meet with *assalamu alaykum*, and told that smiling is an act of charity. We are told to help each other when we are in need, to forgive mistakes, and conceal lapses. We gather for our daily prayers, pay the *Zakah* to each other, fast and go to Hajj together, and meet every week for Friday prayers. This is a religion that values and promotes love and unity between its members, and *shahna'* destroys all of these opportunities to please Allah and make it to Heaven.

When there is *shahna'* inside, the heart is loaded with hate. To treat this, we have to learn how to empty the heart of its anger and resentment. We have to learn how to be balanced in our assessments, more forgiving in our lives, and to consider the whole picture when evaluating our feelings and responses. Here are some helpful steps:

1. Know that all has happened by the will of Allah, and it had to happen the way it did. There are many other things that may annoy us, like hot and cold weather, but we tolerate them because they are inevitable. We will be less angry and less likely to react to what bothers us if we treat it like inevitable weather conditions: all of us must get hurt in this world, and all of us have those who love us and those who hate us.

شَكَا رَجُلٌ إِلَى أَبِي مُسْلِمٍ الْخَوْلَانِيِّ مَا يَلْقَى مِنَ النَّاسِ مِنَ الْأَذَى فقَالَ لَهُ أَبُو مُسْلِمٍ (إِنْ تُنَاقِدِ النَّاسَ يُنَاقِدُوكَ وَإِنْ تَتْرُكْهُمْ لَا يَتْرُكُوكَ وَإِنْ تَفِرَّ مِنْهُمْ يُدْرِكُوكَ) قَالَ (فَمَا أَصْنَعُ؟) قَالَ (هَبْ عِرْضَكَ لِيَوْمِ فَقْرِكَ وَخُذْ شَيْئًا مِنْ لَا شَيْءَ) يَعْنِي الدُّنْيَا.

مداراة الناس لابن أبي الدنيا (ص ٩٦).

A man complained to Abu Muslim al-Khawlani about the harm he is receiving from people, so Abu Muslim said to him: “If you criticize people, they will criticize you. And if you leave them [i.e. ignore them], they won’t leave you. And if you run away from them, they will catch you.” So he asked: “What should I do?” He replied: “Donate your reputation to the day of your poverty [i.e. Day of Judgment], and take something from nothing,” meaning this world.

Mudarat al-Nas (p. 96).

People will hurt us in this life, there is no question about it. But rather than reciprocate, save your good deeds to the Day of Judgment.

2. Know that our sins contribute to the pain we receive. Rather than direct all of our emotions against the individual who hurt us, we should try to erase as many of our sins as we can. When someone hurts us, we should remember the sins that may have caused this pain and ask Allah to forgive us. The best prevention against people’s abuse is to turn back to Allah in forgiveness.

   جَاءَ رَجُلٌ إِلَى أَبَانَ بْنِ أَبِي عَيَّاشٍ فَقَالَ إِنَّ فُلَانًا يَقَعُ فِيكَ قَالَ (أَقْرِئْهُ السَّلَامَ وَأَعْلِمْهُ أَنَّهُ قَدْ هَيَّجَنِي عَلَى الِاسْتِغْفَارِ)

   الصمت لابن أبي الدنيا (ص٢٦٨).

   A man came to Aban ibn Abi ‘Ayyash and told him that someone is speaking ill of him. He said to him: “Give him my *salam* and let him know that he has moved me to ask Allah for forgiveness.”

   Al-Samt by Ibn Abi al-Dunya (p. 268).

3. Remember that this is the time of patience that Allah loves so much and rewards for immensely. The insult we receive is the opportunity for our sins to be forgiven and for our character to

develop further. Rather than it being a sad occasion, it is an opportunity for forgiveness, growth, and maturity.

4. Remember that all the prophets of Allah were hurt, much more aggressively than we will ever experience. When we hear what we hate, we should remember the lives and ordeals of the prophets of Allah and know that no one on this earth will be spared. Read their stories and let that console you.
5. Remember that the best of people are those who are tested. This test may be the way that Allah is increasing our *iman* and station in Jannah.
6. Know that patience and forgiveness are better for your heart and body than anger and punishment. If we surrender to anger and the desire for revenge, they will consume our hearts and minds. We will be constantly agitated, distraught, angry, and miserable. As long as our sole focus is the pain, we will remain unhappy. And when we decide to punish, we remain nervous about the expectation of a counter-punishment and revenge. Usually, these counter-reactions keep escalating far beyond the original hurtful act. On the other hand, patience and forgiveness, especially with the rewards of Allah and His pleasure in mind, leave the heart at ease. There is no more agitation because we have minimized the impact of the incident, re-understood it, and moved beyond it. The heart is now free to focus on what truly benefits it and to escape the trap of the past. In addition, because we chose not to punish, we are no longer worried about an escalating conflict or retaliations. Forgiveness brings us honor and respect in this life, while revenge will drag us through the mud and humiliate us.
7. Know that a nobler station above forgiveness is to repay insults and hurt with kindness. It is reported that Jesus عَلَيْهِ ٱلسَّلَامُ used to say:

كَانَ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ يَقُولُ: (إِنَّ الْإِحْسَانَ لَيْسَ أَنْ تُحْسِنَ إِلَى مَنْ أَحْسَنَ إِلَيْكَ إِنَّمَا تِلْكَ مُكَافَأَةٌ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَلَكِنَّ الْإِحْسَانَ أَنْ تُحْسِنَ إِلَى مَنْ أَسَاءَ إِلَيْكَ)

الزهد لأحمد ابن حنبل (ص٥٠).

Ihsan is not to be kind to the one who is kind to you, for this is repayment of kindness. But *ihsan* is to be kind to the one who wronged you.

Al-Zuhd by Ahmad ibn Hanbal (p. 50).

The one who uses kindness gains friends and loses enemies. He is saved from the plots and harm of people because most of them are on his side and come to his aid when needed. This person can take comfort in knowing that he is decreasing evil in society and in the heart of another human. He can receive joy and happiness in knowing that Allah is more likely to meet his own transgressions with kindness because he used to treat people like this.

كان علي بن الحسين خارجاً من المسجد فلقيه رجل فسبه فثارت إليه العبيد والموالي فقال علي بن الحسين (مهلاً عن الرجل) ثم أقبل على الرجل فقال (ما ستر عنك من أمرنا أكثر. ألك حاجة نعنيك عليها؟) فاستحيا الرجل فألقى عليه خميصة كانت عليه وأمر له بألف درهم فكان الرجل بعد ذلك يقول (أشهد أنك من أولاد الرسول).

صفة الصفوة (ج١ ص٣٥٧).

Ali ibn al-Husayn was exiting the masjid when a man met him and insulted him. So the slaves and servants rose against him, so Ali ibn al-Husayn said: “Leave the man.” Then he came closer to the man and said: “What was concealed from you of my deeds is greater. Do you have a need we can help you with?" The man felt embarrassed, so Ali gave him a piece of clothing he was wearing and gave him one thousand dirhams. So the man used to say afterwards: "I testify that you are of the children of the Prophet."

Sifat al-Safwah (vol. 1, p. 357).

8. The final station is one for the elite. It is to dislike that the heart be occupied with other than Allah. This person is so involved in his worship of Allah, in loving and fearing Him, that the pain people bring him seems like a minor inconvenience and distraction. The depth of his religious devotion eviscerates the actions of people around him and leaves him content dealing with Allah alone.
9. Remember that true friendship and kinship means preserving these ties despite challenges. If we can forgive, then we can maintain our social connections, strengthen them, and, above all, be honest in loving others. What does it say when we are willing to drop all connections at the first sight of trouble? Al-Shafi'i said:

من صدق في أُخُوَّةِ أخيه قَبِلَ عِلَلَه وسَدَّ خَلَلَه وغَفَرَ زَلَلَه.

طبقات الشافعيين (ص٢٩)

The one who is honest in the brotherhood of his brother will accept his excuses, complement his shortcomings, and forgive his mistakes.

Tabaqat al-Shafi'iyyin (p. 29).

Al-Shafi'i also said:

عن يونس بن عبد الاعلى قال قال لي الشافعي: (يا يونس اذا بلغك عن صديق لك ما تكرهه فاياك ان تبادره بالعداوة وقطع الولاية فتكون ممن ازال يقينه بشك ولكن القه وقل له ((بلغني عنك كذا وكذا)) واحذر ان

تسمى له المبلغ فان انكر ذلك فقل له «انت اصدق وابر» لا تزيدن على ذلك شيئا وان اعترف بذلك فرأيت له في ذلك وجها لعذر فاقبل منه وان لم تر ذلك فقل له «ماذا اردت بما بلغني عنك؟» فان ذكر ماله وجه من العذر فاقبل منه وإن لم تر لذلك وجها لعذر وضاق عليك المسلك فحينئذ اثبتها عليه سيئة ثم انت في ذلك بالخيار ان شئت كافاته بمثله من غير زيادة وان شئت عفوت عنه والعفو اقرب للتقوى وابلغ في الكرم لقول الله تعالى: ﴿وَجَزَاءُ سَيِّئَةٍ سَيِّئَةٌ مِثْلُهَا فَمَنْ عَفَا وَأَصْلَحَ فَأَجْرُهُ عَلَى اللَّهِ﴾ [الشورى: ٤٠] فان نازعتك نفسك بالمكأفاة فافكر فيما سبق له لديك من الاحسان فعدها ثم ابدر له احسانا بهذه السيئة ولا تبخسن باقي احسانه السالف بهذه السيئة فان ذلك الظلم بعينه يا يونس اذا كان لك صديق فشد يديك به فان اتخاذ الصديق صعب ومفارقته سهل)

صفة الصفوة (ج١ ص٤٣٦).

O Yunus, if something you hate is reported to you from your friend, never rush to become his enemy and to end his friendship, for you will be the one who chased away the certainty of this friendship with the doubt of his offense. Instead, talk to him and say: "This and this about you has reached me." And beware to mention the name of the one who reported this to you. Then if he denies it, then say to him: "You are more righteous and honest," and say nothing more. But if he admits it and you see that he had an excuse, then accept it from him. If you cannot locate an excuse, say to him: "What did you intend with what has reached me about you?" If he presents an acceptable excuse, then accept it from

> him. But if you cannot find a valid excuse for him and all possibilities for an excuse are eliminated, then confirm this as a mistake. Then you have an option: you can either reward him with the like of his offense, without any addition, or you forgive him, and forgiveness is closer to piety and more generous because Allah says: ﴾And the retribution for an evil act is an evil one like it, but whoever pardons and makes reconciliation then his reward is with Allah﴿ [*al-Shura*: 40]. If your self prompts you towards retribution, then think about all the good he has done to you before, count it, and then respond to his offense with good. And do not disregard all his previous good actions because of this single offense, for this is pure injustice. O Yunus, if you had a friend, then hold on to him, for finding a friend is difficult and leaving him is easy.
>
> *Sifat al-Safwah* (vol. 1, p. 436).

The weekly forgiveness

Forgiveness of sins receives not only an annual reminder but also a weekly one. The Prophet ﷺ said:

> «تُفتَحُ أَبوابُ الجنَّةِ يومَ الاثنينِ ويومَ الخميسِ فيُغفَرُ لِكُلِّ عبدٍ لا يُشرِكُ باللَّهِ شيئًا إلَّا رَجُلًا كانتْ بينَهُ وبينَ أخيهِ شَحْناءُ فيُقالُ (أَنْظِروا هذَينِ حتَّى يصطلِحا أَنظِروا هذَينِ حتَّى يصطلِحا أَنظِروا هذَينِ حتَّى يصطلِحا)»
>
> رواه مسلم (٢٥٦٥) وفي طريق عند مسلم: (تُعرَضُ الأَعمالُ في كُلِّ يومِ خميسٍ واثنينِ).
>
> «The gates of Heaven are opened every Monday and Thursday, and every person who does not commit shirk in Allah will be forgiven except a man who has enmity with his brother. And it will be said "Delay these until they reconcile, delay these

> until they reconcile, delay these until they reconcile."»
>
> Reported in *Sahih Muslim* (2565). In another narration in *Sahih Muslim* (Deeds are presented every Thursday and Monday.)

Every week, we get an opportunity to look into our *ikhlas* (sincerity) of worship, into our *tawhid* of Allah, and into our attitude with our people. If one goes through this weekly maintenance of *iman*, they will likely be ready for the one in the month of Sha'ban.

HADITH SIXTEEN

الحديث السادس عشر

The merciful heart

قالَ رسول الله ﷺ: «خابَ عَبدٌ وَخَسِرَ لَمْ يَجعَل اللهُ تعالى في قلبِهِ رَحْمَةً لِلبَشَرِ»

رواه الدولابي في الكنى وأبو نعيم في المعرفة وابن عساكر في تاريخ دمشق وحسنه الألباني (السلسلة الصحيحة ٤٥٦).

The Messenger ﷺ said: «The one whom Allah did not put in their heart mercy towards people has perished and is in loss.»

Reported by al-Dulabi in *al-Kuna* and Abu Na'im in *al-Ma'rifah* and Ibn 'Asakir in *Tarikh Dimashq* and declared *hasan* by al-Albani (*al-Silsilah al-Sahihah*, 456).

Commentary

Allah reveals His guidance to change our hearts and lives. The hearts that respond get closer to Allah, closer to His Mercy, and thus are more merciful. As the heart is cleansed and edified, it grows softer and gentler. The evidence of the successful purification of our hearts is the presence of greater mercy in it and greater desire for this mercy.

Allah the Most Merciful

Mercy is one of the most defining attributes of Allah when it comes to His creation. The Prophet ﷺ said:

«إنَّ اللهَ كتب كتابًا قبل أن يخلُقَ الخلقَ (إنَّ رحمتي سبَقَتْ غضبي)
فهو مكتوبٌ عندَه فوقَ العرشِ»

رواه البخاري (٧٥٥٤).

> Allah wrote before He created creation: "My Mercy precedes my Anger." It is written with Him above the Throne.
>
> Reported by al-Bukhari (7554).

This is a declaration from Allah before the start of creation that (1) He is making this new world out of mercy and that (2) He will deal with it mercifully. We can glimpse the same meaning from the Quran when Allah says:

ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنُ ١ عَلَّمَ ٱلۡقُرۡءَانَ ٢ خَلَقَ ٱلۡإِنسَٰنَ ٣

Al-Rahman. He taught the Quran. He created humanity.
Al-Rahman (Q55:1–3)

The *ayah* explains that the creation of humans, like the revelation of the Quran, emanates from Allah's Mercy. This conveys that Allah's Mercy surrounds this universe and humanity and is what sustains them. Allah's Mercy in fact reaches every atom in this universe. In another *ayah*, Allah says:

رَبَّنَا وَسِعۡتَ كُلَّ شَيۡءٖ رَّحۡمَةٗ وَعِلۡمٗا

Our Rabb, you have encompassed all things
in mercy and knowledge.
Ghafir (Q40:7)

We see evidence of Allah's Mercy in everything around us. Allah sustains every living being; He supplies them with life and satisfies their basic needs. Even when humans disbelieve in Allah, oppose His guidance, and attack the believers, they still partake of Allah's mercy. The most rebellious human beings continue to receive Allah's mercy every day when they eat, drink, and enjoy the blessings of health, security, and family. In fact, there is no limit to the blessings Allah continues to bestow upon us despite our sins. One of the greatest of these favors is

His Patience and Forgiveness, whereby He does not punish us immediately for our mistakes but gives us chance after chance to repent and change. He is so Merciful in dealing with us that one could spend his entire life in disobedience and repent towards the end of his life, and Allah would grant him Paradise. He is so Merciful with us that he multiplies our good deeds many times over: each good act is worth ten, and some are increased to seven hundred times or more. Yet each sin is written down only as one, and can be forgiven through performing a host of good deeds; and on top of that, there is Allah's forgiveness for the wrong we do. In every second of every day, we enjoy countless blessings from Allah and are inundated with His mercy and forgiveness.

Among the many names of Allah, there are two names that capture His attribute of *Rahmah*: al-Rahman and al-Rahim. Al-Rahman is one who is filled with Mercy, whereas al-Rahim is the one who delivers this Mercy to his creation. Allah is Merciful in Himself and Merciful in His dealings with His creation. Like the name Allah, al-Rahman is a unique name of Allah and no one shares it with Him. Though a human can be described as *rahim*, no human can be described as *rahman*. In addition to al-Rahman and al-Rahim, Allah has several other names that convey the meanings of *rahmah* and kindness such as al-Rafiq, al-Ra'uf, al-Latif, and al-Halim, in addition to other names that reflect His forgiveness and pardoning of sin.

It is no coincidence that these two names, al-Rahman and al-Rahim, are the ones that Allah chose to describe Himself with before the start of each *surah*. We repeat these two names before each *surah* when we say bismillahi al-Rahman al-Rahim. What is truly fascinating is that Allah could have chosen different names before different *surahs* to convey other relevant attributes of His, such as Wisdom, Knowledge, Power, and so on. We could've easily recited bismillahi al-Hakim al-Khabir or bismillahi al-Qawiyyi al-'Aziz, but we begin our reading of each of the *surahs* of the Quran with the same two names: al-Rahman al-Rahim. This announces to readers and listeners alike that what follows is a book of mercy from the Most Merciful. And the Most Merciful desires only the best for you and in the best of ways, and the hearts tend to listen to one who cares about them so much. This also reminds us that we, as Allah's creation, are closely linked in our worldly and otherworldly existence to the Mercy of Allah, and that our fate in both worlds depends on and is closely tied to Allah's Mercy.

The attribute of *rahmah* is one which we are most in need of. We need our sins to be forgiven and we desire entry into Jannah. We need it for our continued worldly existence and the removal of hardship and pain. We need it if we are ever going to experience any happiness in our lives. We need it every second when we inhale and exhale. And since it is the attribute we need the most, it should also be the attribute we embrace the most in dealing with others around us. If Allah created this world out of mercy and for mercy, then Allah would also love this quality from the people that He created.

Becoming more merciful

Allah, the Most High, loves mercy and those who are merciful. The Prophet ﷺ said:

> «إنَّ للهِ آنيةً من أهلِ الأرضِ وآنيةُ ربِّكم قلوبُ عبادِه الصالحين وأحبُّها إليه أليَنُها وأرَقُّها»
>
> رواه الطبراني في المعجم الكبير وقال الألباني عنه إسناده قوي (السلسلة الصحيحة ١٦٩١).
>
> «Allah has vessels from the inhabitants of earth, and the vessels of your Rabb are the hearts of His pious slaves. And the most beloved of these hearts to Him are the softest and gentlest.»
>
> Reported by al-Tabarani and al-Albani said that its chain is strong (*al-Silsilah al-Sahihah*, 1691).

These hearts are the best containers for the *iman* that Allah sent down to this earth, the *iman* that brings them closer to the Most Merciful and His Mercy. As they absorb the truths of *iman*, know Allah more, and love what He loves, they grow in their own *rahmah* and become the softest and gentlest of hearts. They are soft and gentle (i.e. not rebellious) when it comes to accepting Allah's commands, in their reactions to Allah's revelation (e.g. crying when reading the Quran and when remembering Allah), and in their relationships with people. The fact that Allah loves these hearts the most is testimony to the fact that this is what Allah desires for our hearts.

The heart that contains mercy towards others is one that is promised Paradise. The Prophet ﷺ said that one of the categories of the people of Paradise is:

«ورَجُلٌ رَحِيمٌ رَقِيقُ الْقَلْبِ لِكُلِّ ذِي قُرْبَى ومُسْلِمٍ»
رواه مسلم (٢٨٦٥).

> «And a man who is merciful and kind-hearted towards every kin and every Muslim.»
>
> Reported by Muslim (2865).

Another *hadith* emphasizes that kindness and mercy bring the Mercy of Allah closer to us:

«الرَّاحمونَ يرحمُهُمُ الرَّحمنُ ارحَموا من في الأرضِ يرحَمْكم من في السَّماءِ»
رواه الترمذي (١٩٢٤) وصححه الألباني (صحيح الترمذي ١٩٢٤).

> «Al-Rahman will have mercy on the merciful. Be merciful with those on earth and the One above the Heavens will be merciful with you.»
>
> Reported by al-Tirmidhi (1924) and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Tirmidhi*, 1924).

Since mercy is the attribute that Allah put forward in dealing with us, He wants it to be the character we put forward when we deal with other people. When we become the instrument of mercy and the reason others are receiving it, we would be eligible for this mercy ourselves, this time directly from Allah the Most Merciful. In being merciful, we would be advancing what Allah loves and increasing the *rahmah* in the world that Allah created out of mercy.

Possession of the quality of *rahmah* is a sign of Allah's love and favor. The Prophet ﷺ said:

> «إذا أرادَ اللهُ عز وجلَ بأهلِ بيتٍ خيرا أدخلَ عليهِم الرفقَ»
>
> أخرجه أحمد والبيهقي في شعب الإيمان وصححه الألباني (السلسلة الصحيحة ١٢١٩).
>
> «When Allah wants the best for a household, He bestows kindness on them.»
>
> Reported by Ahmad and al-Bayhaqi in *Shu'ab al-Iman* and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*al-Silsilah al-Sahihah*, 1219).

This means that kindness, forgiveness, and magnanimity in dealing with others is a sign of Allah's favor upon a family. This is what families should aspire to be on the inside (within its members) and the outside (dealing with other families and people). If family members want to receive kindness from Allah and desire to improve their family life, they should show more *rahmah* in their family relations. Spouses, parents, and children should care for the feelings of each other, use the best and softest of words, forgive mistakes and oversights, accept the limitations and weaknesses of others, learn not to burden others with expectations and demands, and avoid excessive and unhelpful criticism, blame, and suspicion. The weaker and more sensitive our relatives are, the more that they need of this *rahmah* and care and the more that we should give of it. Kindness and mercy can dramatically improve strained family relations and heal our domestic problems.

Iman and mercy

The guidance of Allah and *iman* are the greatest mercy we receive from Him. This mercy brings the most meaningful change to our lives and saves us in the next. This mercy opens the doors of eternal happiness for us, without pain, worry, or suffering. The one with the greatest portion of this mercy is the most guided and most knowledgeable. Since the most learned know most about this mercy, it is they who should develop the most merciful attitudes. Ibn al-Qayyim notes (*Ighathat al-Lahfan*, vol. 2, p. 173) that there is a connection between *ilm* (knowledge) and mercy: as the first expands, so should the second. Allah says about Himself:

رَبَّنَا وَسِعْتَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ رَّحْمَةً وَعِلْمًا

Our Rabb, you have encompassed all things
in mercy and knowledge.
Ghafir (Q40:7)

As Allah's knowledge encompasses everything, so does His *Rahmah* encompass everything. Allah knows all of our weaknesses and needs, all of what works for us and what doesn't. Allah's mercy covers all of our weaknesses and needs, and brings us closest to what benefits us while protecting us from harm. Since Allah knows us the best, He is the Most Merciful to us. In the same vein, Ibn al-Qayyim notes that the one with the greatest knowledge would be the one with the greatest mercy. Why should our knowledge increase our *rahmah*? Contemplate with me the following:

1. The one with depth of knowledge and understanding knows that the intention behind the creation of humanity and this universe is mercy, and so they follow the divine objective: they pursue mercy and increase it in the world around them. They don't contradict

Allah's objective by denying mercy, stopping it when it happens, or decreasing it in the world.

2. The one with the greatest knowledge worships Allah through His names and attributes. Since *rahmah* is one of Allah's greatest and most expansive attributes (it covers all of His creation), he adopts this quality in his life to be closer to Allah.
3. When one knows how much Allah loves mercy and forgiveness, they will naturally love what Allah loves. It is hard then to imagine one loving Allah and yet failing to embrace *rahmah* in their life.
4. The one with the greatest knowledge understands best the extent of Allah's mercy and forgiveness. Allah grants us chance after chance and keeps forgiving our mistakes no matter what they may be. This understanding translates to an attitude of mercy that seeks to rescue the slaves of Allah from their mistakes and secure their entry into Jannah. We then change from beings intent on revenge and self-satisfaction into ones worried about the people we meet and seeking the best for them.
5. The learned comprehend human frailty and weaknesses and where they lead, and they sympathizes with every human as a result. When we know and feel the pain of every human as our own, we will naturally seek to alleviate it whenever we can.
6. The one with knowledge is intimately aware of the plots of Shaytan and his desire to destroy every single human being. Thus, this person views each person with a merciful eye and works to save them, excusing their mistakes rather than rushing to condemn them or wishing them ill.
7. The one with the greatest knowledge is the one who fears Hell the most and desires Heaven the most. When he knows that Allah bestows His mercy on the merciful and forgives the forgiving, he will adopt these features in hope of saving his soul.

We see the affirmation of the close link between *rahmah* and knowledge in the life of the Prophet ﷺ and his Companions. He was the one who knew Allah the most and was most merciful to the people around him. His generous attitude stemmed from how well he knew Allah and loved Him, and from the desire in his heart to save everyone around him. After the Prophet ﷺ, it was Abu Bakr who was the most knowledgeable and he was the most merciful with the Ummah of Muhammad ﷺ. One of the important consequences of our *iman* is how well we treat other people. Any deficiency in the outcome (mercy) is an indication of a deficiency in the cause (*iman*).

Tazkiyah and rahmah

From all that we've learned so far, we understand that getting closer to Allah leads to developing a more merciful disposition and attitude. In particular, the more that we purify our hearts, the more mercy there will be in them.

When we cleanse our hearts from disease, we rid them of arrogance, envy, jealousy, and worldly competition. These are the main reasons for cruelty in dealings with other people. When we remove these illnesses, we extricate ourselves from the intricate web of hatred and cruelty, and then our hearts will be open for *rahmah*. When our intention is Allah, we no longer view others as potential threats and competitors but see them as we see ourselves: weak slaves of Allah in desperate need of Allah's help and guidance. We remember our flaws when we see theirs, and our weaknesses when we encounter theirs. We know that unless Allah is with us, we would not triumph against a challenge or be able to escape a mistake. Rather than standing in judgment over others, we would see ourselves as agents in their escape from Shaytan, in a transformation that solves their problems and takes them to Allah's love. It is more pleasing to Allah that one be saved than condemned, that they live a happy rather than a miserable life. And if what is pleasing to

Allah is what we also desire, then we would leave cruelty behind and embrace a more clement attitude.

Cruelty comes from a hardened heart, a heart that is faraway from Allah. Such a heart does not melt or shed tears when it receives Allah's revelations or when it encounters human suffering. Remembering Allah, the Hereafter, and our sins softens the hearts. The soft hearts are easily moved, and they humbly react to the truth when they see it. They are also gentlest and kindest with humanity. A clean heart jumps at any opportunity to be close to Allah. And when it knows that *rahmah* is most beloved to Allah, it becomes most beloved to it. When *tazkiyah* is allowed to treat our hearts, *rahmah* naturally inhabits it and outflows from it.

Mercy and success

The *hadith* explains that the one devoid of mercy for people is also devoid of success, and this includes the success of this life and the next. As for the Hereafter, the absence of mercy indicates a weak or absent *iman*, which would explain the dearth of mercy in this person's life. This person is likely to suffer from a stiff heart that does not respond easily to divine guidance, and it misses out on many good deeds due to its lack of *rahmah* and kindness to others. As for this life, this hard heart repels people with its cruelty, harshness, and how little it cares about them. People naturally avoid this person and refuse to assist him, making it harder for him to succeed. In addition, Allah will hold back on assisting this person because of his unkindness. Without mercy, this person would turn himself into someone that both Allah and people dislike.

The merciful, on the other hand, is loved by Allah and humanity. Allah loves him because of his *iman* and the *rahmah* that he has in his heart for everyone around him. People also love him and assist him because of how much he cares for them and endeavors to solve their problems. As the *hadith* affirms, mercy and success are twins in this life and the next. We should remember this whenever we think or are advised that cruelty and dishonesty are the keys to success in this life. If we believe in Allah and trust His promises, then we would remember that true and long-term success is intimately linked to a merciful heart.

The Disconnect between iman and rahmah

Since *rahmah* is linked to *iman*, the lack of *rahmah* in our hearts, houses, and societies is a sign that *iman* is in short supply. Just like any other deficiency in our lives, the problem is either one of knowledge or its application. We either have no clue about the importance of *rahmah* in Islam and in our relationship with Allah or we continue to fail in following what we know. The knowledge deficiency manifests itself in religious individuals, groups, and societies that love Islam and desire to please Allah but fail to show this mercy in their lives. The disconnect there is most disturbing because cruelty and unkindness will be unjustly attributed to the religion of Islam through the malpractice of its members, and these members may not feel that are doing anything wrong. The practice deficiency—where people know the truth but fail to follow it—is less serious in a sense because people know the truth, but it is more serious in another because our hearts are less inclined to obey Allah and draw near to Him. The remedy for knowledge-deficiency is learning the centrality of *rahmah* in Islam and how it paves the way to our reception of the divine mercy. No living heart would pass up the opportunity to be so close to Allah and to people. The cure for the application-malady is to increase our love and fear of Allah so our hearts can start practicing what they already know. Purifying our hearts from disease is indispensable if we want to follow the truth. A burdened heart is not going anywhere.

HADITH SEVENTEEN

الحديث السابع عشر

The heart and obligatory worship

قالَ رسول الله ﷺ: «ما مِنْكُم رجُلٌ يُقَرِّبُ وَضوءَهُ فَيَتَمَضْمَضُ ويَسْتَنْشِقُ فَيَنْتَثِرُ إِلَّا خَرَّتْ خَطايا وَجْهِهِ وَفِيهِ وَخياشيمِهِ ثُمَّ إذا غَسَلَ وَجْهَهُ كما أَمَرَهُ اللهُ إلا خَرَّتْ خطايا وَجْهِهِ مِن أَطرافِ لِحْيَتِهِ مَعَ الماءِ ثُمَّ يَغْسِلُ يَدَيْهِ إِلى المِرْفَقَيْنِ إلا خَرَّتْ خَطايا يَدَيْهِ مِنْ أَنامِلِهِ مع الماءِ ثُمَّ يَمْسَحُ رَأْسَهُ إلا خَرَّتْ خَطايا رَأسِهِ مِن أَطرافِ شَعْرِهِ مع الماءِ ثُمَّ يَغْسِلُ قَدَمَيْهِ إلى الكَعْبَيْنِ إلا خَرَّتْ خطايا رِجْلَيْهِ من أَنامِلِهِ مع الماءِ فَإنْ هُوَ قامَ فَصَلَّى فَحَمِدَ الله تعالى وَأَثْنَى عَلَيْهِ وَمَجَّدَهُ بِالَّذِي هُوَ لَهُ أَهْلٌ وَفَرَّغَ قَلْبَهُ للهِ تعالى إِلا انصَرَفَ مِنْ خَطِيئَتِهِ كَهَيْئَتِهِ يَوْمَ وَلَدَتْهُ أُمُّهُ»

رواه مسلم (٨٣٢) في قصة إسلام عمرو ابن عَبَسَة.

The Messenger ﷺ said: «When a person brings *Wudu* water close and washes his mouth and nose, the sins committed by his face, mouth, and nose fall out. Then when he washes his face as commanded by Allah, the sins of his face fall from the ends of his beard with the water. Then when he washes his hands up to the elbows, the sins of his hands fall out from his fingers with the water. Then when he wipes over his head, the sins of the head fall out from the ends of his hair with the water. Then when he washes his feet to the ankles, the sins of his feet fall out from his toes with the water. Then if he stands up for *Salah* and thanks Allah, praises Him, glorifies Him as He deserves, and dedicates his heart wholly to Allah, he emerges sin free as the day he was born.»

Reported by Muslim (832).

Commentary

The worship that Allah has obligated, especially recurrent ones, is what He loves and rewards for the most. What we often forget about these obligations is the great impact they have on our hearts and their purification effect. When these acts are done as Allah commanded and with complete devotion, they are unparalleled in their reward and *tazkiyah*. And this is why Allah made them recurrent obligations, so they can aid us on our journey to Allah.

Habit vs. conscious worship

There is a diversity of acts of worship in Islam. This diversity serves many purposes. For one, it responds to our own diversity, where we excel, and what we are capable of doing. Thus, Allah gives us the opportunity to be more dedicated in specific worship—for instance some fast more than others, spend more than others, or learn more than others—in accordance with our skills and proclivities. The diversity also responds to our different needs, where each worship is there to edify us and purify us in different ways: one with money, one with body, one with both, one is solitary, one is social, and so on. The diversity also helps stave off boredom, where we can move between different acts while still worshiping Allah. For instance, we can read the Quran and then move to help someone with a problem and then head to the mosque to pray; though we are moving between different acts, we are still engaged in the worship of Allah. Finally, this diversity allows us to graduate in our practice, to do more when we are spiritually strong and less, without compromising the basics, when we are weak. It outlines the (1) basics that we need to take care of daily, weekly, and annually; (2) communal and individual responsibilities; and (3) the varying levels and priorities of obligatory acts. This diversity in worship is from the mercy of Allah and should be thanked and appreciated.

Yet in the midst of the sea of good things and deeds we can do, the

Muslim can get lost deciding what to do, when, and which should come first. When this happens, it is important to keep the next *hadith* in mind. The Prophet ﷺ told us that Allah loves what He obligated on us the most. He said that Allah said:

«وما تقرَّب إليَّ عبدي بشيءٍ أحبَّ إليَّ ممَّا افترضتُ عليه»
صحيح البخاري (٦٥٠٢).

> «And my slave will not draw nearer to me than with what I have obligated on him.»
>
> Reported by al-Bukhari (6502).

The obligations are what Allah loves the most, and they consequently possess the greatest benefits for this life and the next. In the Muslim's mind, they should always take precedence and be taken care of first. They, on their own, can take us to Paradise. As reported in al-Bukhari (46), a man came to the Messenger ﷺ and inquired about the obligatory acts of praying, fasting, and *Zakah*. When he stated that he will closely follow them but not add anything to them, the Prophet ﷺ proclaimed that he will be successful if he is true to his word. Though no one can deny the importance of voluntary acts, nothing can replace the foundational worship that Allah had made a must on all Muslims.

Obligatory worship has the greatest potential for soul-edification and purification. Because of their spiritual potency, Allah the Most Wise made these acts recurring so that they can continue to guide and support us in our spiritual fights. Allah, for instance, says about *Salah*:

وَأَقِمِ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَۖ إِنَّ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ تَنۡهَىٰ عَنِ ٱلۡفَحۡشَآءِ
وَٱلۡمُنكَرِۗ وَلَذِكۡرُ ٱللَّهِ أَكۡبَرُۗ

And establish prayer. Indeed, prayer prohibits immorality and wrongdoing, and the remembrance of Allah is greater.
Al-Ankabut (Q29:45)

Al-Saʿdi wrote in his *Tafsir* that the *Salah* has this effect because the one who establishes prayer as it should be established, connects himself to Allah and so his *iman* increases. Consequently, his heart is purified, his desire for evil decreases or vanishes, and his intent to do good grows stronger, especially with the steady repetition of the *Salah*. This is one of the great objectives of the *Salah*. And the greatest objective, which brings in the first, is to remember Allah and get closer to Him.

Because of its importance, Allah commands us to rely on our *Salah* in accomplishing what we want to do and enduring what we dislike. Allah says:

وَٱسۡتَعِينُواْ بِٱلصَّبۡرِ وَٱلصَّلَوٰةِۚ وَإِنَّهَا لَكَبِيرَةٌ إِلَّا عَلَى ٱلۡخَٰشِعِينَ

And seek help through patience and prayer, and indeed, it is
difficult except for the humbly submissive [to Allah].
Al-Baqarah (Q2:45)

In accomplishing anything in life, especially the worship of Allah, we need to rely on a great deal of patience. And with patience comes the *Salah* to offer us the greatest support we need. As we perform it and repeat it, it moves us to loftier intentions and deeds, further away from baser wishes and actions. But for it to do this, it has to be done with submission and humility before the Creator. Without this *khushu*ʿ, the prayer would not only be hard, but it would also fail to bring any noticeable change to our lives.

The Prophet ﷺ loved the divine connection of the *Salah* and relied on it whenever he was in distress. The *hadith* states:

كانَ النَّبيُّ صلَّى اللَّهُ عليْهِ وسلَّمَ إذا حزبَهُ أمرٌ صلَّى.

رواه أبو داود (١٣١٩) وحسنه ابن حجر والألباني (صحيح أبي داود ١٣١٩).

When distress would befall the Prophet ﷺ, he would pray.

Reported by Abu Dawud (1319) and declared *hasan* by Ibn Hajar and al-Albani (*Sahih Abi Dawud*, 1319).

This brings a different understanding of Allah's worship and connection to it, one that does not look at it as an obligation to be done with but as an asset and aid to be cherished and pursued. When this spirit is alive in our worship, it will bring magnificent results to our lives, including a pure and peaceful heart. But when worship turns into a dreaded chore and a lifeless habit, it loses many of the benefits deposited in it. While discussing the ill-effects of innovations, Ibn Taymiyyah notes how obligatory and voluntary worship can devolve into a burden while the innovated act is revered as true worship:

> أن القلوب تستعذبها وتستغني بها عن كثير من السنن، حتى تجد كثيرًا من العامة يحافظ عليها ما لا يحافظ على التراويح والصلوات الخمس. ومنها أن الخاصة والعامة تنقص -بسببها- عنايتهم بالفرائض والسنن، ورغبتهم فيها، فتجد الرجل يجتهد فيها، ويخلص وينيب، ويفعل فيها ما لا يفعله في الفرائض والسنن، حتى كأنه يفعل هذه عبادة، ويفعل الفرائض والسنن عادة ووظيفة، وهذا عكس الدين، فيفوته بذلك ما في الفرائض والسنن من المغفرة والرحمة والرقة والطهارة والخشوع، وإجابة الدعوة، وحلاوة المناجاة.
>
> اقتضاء الصراط المستقيم (ج٢ ص١١٩).
>
> [Of the harm of innovated acts is that] the hearts find them to be sweet and find in them their satisfaction to the exclusion of many of the *sunnahs*, to the extent that you will find many of the masses observing its performance more than *Tarawih* and the five daily prayers. And from its harms is that the public and the elites falter in their attention to the obligations and *sunnahs* because of it, so you will find a man striving in them, sincere and repentant, and does in them what he does not in the obligations and the *sunnahs*, as if he is doing this out

> of worship and he does the obligations and *sunnahs* out of habit and duty, and this is the opposite of religion. And he misses because of it what's in the obligations and *sunnahs* of forgiveness, mercy, gentleness, purity, reverence, answering of *du'a*, and the sweetness of conversing with Allah.
>
> *Iqtida' al-Sirat al-Mustaqim* (vol. 2, p. 119).

The obligations were not simply legislated to kill time or for physical exercise but to bring with them the great benefit of renewing our *iman*, reminding us of the Hereafter, removing our sins, shielding us from our bad desires and intentions, and treating our hearts. Rather than seeking *tazkiyah* through questionable or baseless practices, we should pay the greatest attention to what Allah obligated on us and allow it to do its job of changing our lives.

The purification of Wudu and Salah

The *hadith* in this chapter tells us how each part of *Wudu* removes the corresponding sins of the body. Rinsing the mouth, nose, and washing the face remove their sins and those of the eyes. Washing the hands takes care of their sins, wiping the head cancels the mistakes of the ears, and washing the feet removes their sins. The fact that the sins are removed with the water points to how speedy this forgiveness is: it is not delayed forgiveness but one that cleanses us from sin as soon as the water leaves our bodies. Thinking about *Wudu* in this way helps in transforming it from a repetitive and habitual act that had lost its meaning into a spiritual cleanse to look forward to, especially when we make mistakes and are looking for forgiveness. When we view each step of *Wudu* as one removing the sins of our body, we will love it, we will take care to perform it well, and we will be happy to repeat it every time as we would when our body is dirty, and we need to take a shower. We typically emerge refreshed and feeling clean from our showers, and our *Wudu* would do the same for our souls and hearts.

Emptied his heart for Allah

After the performance of *Wudu*, the spiritual cleanse of sin, the worshiper stands before Allah in *Salah*. He empties his heart of any other concern and thinks only about his Creator. He empties his heart from dependence and reliance on anyone other than Allah, from fearing anyone more than Allah, and from loving anyone more than Allah. This level of devotion and concentration, of course, takes deliberate and repeated attempts to achieve. The *hadith* describes this person as one who has worked on his heart to remove anything in it but Allah (the emphasis of the verb *farragha* indicates that he exhausted his effort in cleansing his heart until he achieved it). This is an ongoing effort. The Prophet ﷺ said:

> «إنَّ الرَّجلَ لينصرِفُ وما كُتِبَ لَه إلَّا عُشرُ صلاتِهِ تُسعُها ثُمنُها سُبعُها سُدسُها خُمسُها رُبعُها ثُلثُها نِصفُها»
>
> رواه أبو داود (٧٩٦) وحسنه الألباني في صحيح أبي داود (٧٩٦).
>
> «The man would leave and only one tenth of his prayer has been written for him, one ninth, one eighth, one seventh, one sixth, one fifth, one quarter, one third, or one half.»
>
> Reported by Abu Dawud (796) and al-Albani declared it *hasan* in *Sahih Abi Dawud* (796).

It is noteworthy that the Prophet ﷺ did not go beyond half in explaining the rewards of the *Salah*, perhaps suggesting that Shaytan will always fight to steal part of our *Salah*. But the believer never surrenders to Shaytan and strives to preserve the reward of his *Salah* until he comes as close as he can to complete devotion to Allah. And as long as he is fighting for his *Salah*, he has the reward of striving for the sake of Allah.

Wudu is not the only cleansing act we should undertake before the *Salah*. Before and during the *Salah*, we also have to check our hearts and rescue them from intruding thoughts and interests that compete with our *Salah* and steal its reward. The more one struggles with himself and his thoughts to bring them to order, the more that he will be rewarded for striving for Allah's sake and the more that he will get from his *Salah*. And the more that one struggles and persists to maintain an attentive heart, the easier that this would become with time. And then, we can become those who taste the sweetness of prayer and find in it support for whatever we face in this life. The conversation we have with Allah in the *Salah*—praising Him, thanking Him, asking Him, and telling him about our problems—becomes the sweetest exchange and time we spend during the day. No other encounter or conversation even comes close to how satisfying and remedial this one can be.

The consequence of purification

This is one of the great *hadiths* that link outer and inner worship, physical acts and the internal transformation they bring. It demonstrates the great mercy and reward associated with working on our hearts and purifying them for the sake of Allah. The *hadith* states that our previous sins will be forgiven as a result of these acts. This could refer to all sins, major and minor, or specifically to minor sins while major ones still require repentance (*tawbah*). Al-Nawawi in his commentary on *Sahih Muslim* favors that it is only minor sins that are forgiven, while others like al-Shawkani in *Nayl al-Awtar* (vol. 1, p. 187) and Ibn al-ʿAttar (student of al-Nawawi) in *al-ʿUddah fi Sharh al-ʿUmdah* (vol. 1, p. 92) say that the apparent meaning includes both major and minor sins.

The great reward outlined in the *hadith* is a result of a combination of the internal and external worship of Allah. All the acts of worship that Allah commanded are designed to bring us close to Allah. This means that any physical act has an indispensable internal component that is part of what makes worship whole. When we disconnect the two, we receive an incomplete ritual that falls short of fulfilling its goals and bringing us happiness and serenity. The task of the seeker of *tazkiyah* is to rediscover these disconnected parts and reconnect them in his/her life so we can receive the full benefits of our worship. The seeker of *tazkiyah* should also keep in mind the otherworldly benefits of the purification act: we do not only engage in *tazkiyah* to be happier and more content in this world, but we do it because it is the path to forgiveness of sin, Paradise, and Allah's love. This *hadith* demonstrates that the rewards of *tazkiyah* are too great to ignore.

The story behind the hadith

The Companion who narrated this *hadith* was Amr ibn Abasah. He explains in the beginning of the *hadith* how he came to Islam and how he came to ask the Prophet ﷺ about *Salah* and *Wudu*. He says:

قال عَمرو بنُ عبسةَ السُّلَميُّ: (كنتُ وأنا في الجاهليةِ أظنُّ أنَّ الناسَ على ضلالةٍ وأنهم ليسوا على شيءٍ وهم يعبدون الأوثانَ فسمعتُ برجلٍ بمكةَ يخبِر أخبارًا فقعدتُ على راحلتي فقدمتُ عليه فإذا رسولُ اللهِ صلَّى اللهُ عليه وسلَّمَ مُستخفيًا جُرَءَاءُ عليه قومُه فتلطَّفتُ حتى دخلتُ عليه بمكةَ فقلتُ له ((ما أنت؟)) قال «أنا نبيٌّ» فقلتُ ((وما نبيٌّ؟)) قال «أرسلَني اللهُ» فقلتُ ((وبأيِّ شيءٍ أرسلَك؟)) قال «أرسلني بصلةِ الأرحامِ وكسرِ الأوثانِ وأن يُوحَّدَ اللهُ لا يشركُ به شيئًا» قلتُ له ((فمن معك على هذا؟)) قال «حُرٌّ وعبدٌ» (قال ومعه يومئذٍ أبو بكرٍ وبلالٌ ممَّن آمن به) فقلتُ ((إني مُتَّبِعُك)) قال «إنك لا تستطيعُ ذلك يومَك هذا ألا ترى حالي وحالَ الناسِ؟ ولكن ارْجِعْ إلى أهلِك فإذا سمعتَ بي قد ظهرتُ فأْتِني» قال فذهبتُ إلى أهلي وقدِم رسولُ اللهِ صلَّى اللهُ عليه

وسلَّمَ المدينةَ وكنتُ في أهلي فجعلتُ أتخبَّر الأخبارَ وأسأل الناسَ حين قدم المدينةَ حتى قدم على نفرٍ من أهلِ يثربَ من أهلِ المدينةِ فقلتُ ((ما فعل هذا الرجلُ الذي قدم المدينةَ؟)) فقالوا الناسُ ((إليه سِراعٌ وقد أراد قومُه قتلَه فلم يستطيعوا ذلك)) فقدمتُ المدينةَ فدخلتُ عليه فقلتُ ((يا رسولَ اللهِ أَتعرِفُني؟)) قال «نعم أنت الذي لقِيتَني بمكةَ» قال فقلتُ ((بلى)) فقلتُ ((يا نبيَّ اللهِ أَخْبِرْني عما علَّمك اللهُ وأَجهلُه))

رواه مسلم (٨٣٢).

In the Period of Ignorance before Islam, I used to think that people who used to worship idols were misguided and were not holding on to anything true. Then I heard of a man in Makkah who was saying some things. So I mounted my camel and went to him. I found the Messenger of Allah ﷺ hiding, and his people were aggressive with him. I entered Makkah stealthily and when I met him I asked him: "Who are you?" He ﷺ said: «I am a Prophet.» I asked: "What is a Prophet?" He said: «Allah has sent me.» I asked: "With what did He send you?" He replied: «He sent me to strengthen the ties of kinship, to destroy idols, and that Allah alone should be worshiped and nothing should be associated with Him.» I asked: "Who has followed you in this?" He said: «A freeman and a slave.» (At that time, Abu Bakr and Bilal were the believers that were with him). I said: "I shall follow you." He said: «You cannot do that now. Do you not see my situation and that of the people? Go to your people, and when you hear that I have prevailed, come to me.» So I went back to my people, and while I was with my people, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ emigrated to Madinah. I continued to ask people about him till some of my people visited Madinah. When

> they returned, I asked them: "How is that man who has arrived in Madinah doing?" They said: "People are rushing to him. His own people had planned to kill him but did not succeed." Then I went to Madinah and came to him and said: "O Messenger of Allah, do you recognize me?" He ﷺ said: «Yes. You are the one who met me in Makkah.» I said: "O Messenger of Allah, teach me of that which Allah has taught you and I do not know."
>
> Reported by Muslim (832).

What is striking in this story is the patience of this great Companion, who stayed away for approximately thirteen years until the Prophet ﷺ was secure in Madinah. What is also striking is his love and desire for the truth, which kept him patiently waiting for all of these years, with little Islamic knowledge except the basics of *tawhid*. And when he rejoined the Prophet ﷺ, the first thing he sought was to learn Islam. His devotion and love of learning brought us knowledge of this great *Hadith*.

Project

Try to implement and follow this *hadith* in the next twenty-four hours. Before you start, please brush up quickly on how to make *Wudu* according to the Sunnah, so that you can perform it as Allah commanded. Then when you are performing your *Wudu*, imagine with each step the sins falling out of your body with the water. Note how this makes you feel as you cleanse body and soul from contamination. Next, look up the *du'a* that we should say after *Wudu* and say it. Now comes the time to stand in *Salah* and attempt to pray a voluntary or obligatory *Salah* with full concentration, praising Allah and thinking about each word/supplication/praise you say. See how far you go in the *Salah* with full concentration, and plan to pray with this focus the next time you pray or at least another time within the next twenty-four hours. Plan on doing this for a whole week and mark the transformation this brings to your *Salah*, heart, and life in general. Pen your progress in a diary or notebook and plan for your next *Salah* attempt.

HADITH EIGHTEEN

الحديث الثامن عشر

Tawhid and the heart

قالَ رسول الله ﷺ: «إنِّي لأَعْلَمُ كَلِمَةً لا يَقولُها عَبْدٌ حَقًّا مِن قَلبِه فَيَموتُ على ذلكَ إلَّا حُرِّمَ عَلى النَّارِ لا إلهَ إلَّا اللهُ»

رواه الحاكم (٢٤٢) وابن حبان (٢٠٤) وصححه الألباني (صحيح الترغيب ١٥٢٨).

The Messenger ﷺ said: «I know a statement that no one says truly from their heart except that they will be saved from Hellfire: *La ilah illa Allah*.»

Reported by al-Hakim (242) and Ibn Hibban (204) and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Targhib*, 1528).

Commentary

We've seen in the last *hadith* the great reward associated with performing acts of worship with a pure and devoted heart. Yet the greatest obedience that Allah loves is the affirmation of His *tawhid*. When *tawhid* comes out from a fully devoted heart, it will bring the greatest *tazkiyah* to our hearts and earn the greatest reward in both worlds.

Tawhid and the hearts

The greatest disease of the heart is the disease of *shirk* (having partners in worship with Allah). It is the only offense that Allah does not forgive unless one repents from it before their death. Allah says:

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَا يَغْفِرُ أَن يُشْرَكَ بِهِۦ وَيَغْفِرُ مَا دُونَ ذَٰلِكَ لِمَن يَشَآءُ ۚ
وَمَن يُشْرِكْ بِٱللَّهِ فَقَدِ ٱفْتَرَىٰٓ إِثْمًا عَظِيمًا

Indeed Allah does not forgive association with Him, but He forgives lesser than that for whom He wills. And he who associates others with Allah has certainly fabricated a tremendous sin.
Al-Nisa (Q4:48)

It is such an unforgivable sin, the only one in fact, because it produces the greatest injustice and the greatest harm. It is the greatest injustice because it joins partners with the One with the greatest favors and rights upon us. Our responsibilities and duties towards someone are commensurate with their favors upon us. Consider, for example, that our responsibilities on the human level are greatest with our parents because they brought us into this life and took care of us when we were weakest. Since they were the reason for our existence and their care and sacrifice is the greatest, Allah gave them the greatest rights upon us in terms of respect, help, obedience, and care. Now, when it comes to Allah, it is He who provided us all that we have. He is the One who made us out of nothing and gave us consciousness, sight, hearing, and mobility. It is He who gives us shelter, health, security, and peace. He is the One who gave us all the people that we love and all the things that we love; we can only feel love and receive it because of Allah. He is the One who sustains us every single second, and feeds us every single day. He is the one who preserves our lives and protects us from harm every minute of each day and night. As Allah says:

وَمَا بِكُم مِّن نِّعْمَةٍ فَمِنَ ٱللَّهِ ۖ ثُمَّ إِذَا مَسَّكُمُ ٱلضُّرُّ فَإِلَيْهِ تَجْـَٔرُونَ ﴿٥٣﴾
ثُمَّ إِذَا كَشَفَ ٱلضُّرَّ عَنكُمْ إِذَا فَرِيقٌ مِّنكُم بِرَبِّهِمْ يُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٥٤﴾

And whatever you have of favors, it is from Allah. Then

> when adversity touches you, to Him you cry for help. Then
> when He removes the adversity from you, at once a party of
> you associates others with their Lord.
> Al-Nahl (Q16:53–54)

When every single blessing and favor we have is from Allah, we owe Him our greatest gratitude and love. And when we turn to others instead of Him in worship, attributing these blessings to them and relying on them, we would have committed the greatest ingratitude and wrong.

Another reason why shirk is such a heinous crime is that knowledge of Allah is the clearest and most self-evident fact we know. Allah says:

> قَالَتۡ رُسُلُهُمۡ أَفِي ٱللَّهِ شَكّٞ فَاطِرِ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلۡأَرۡضِۖ
>
> Their messengers said: “Can there be doubt about Allah,
> Creator of the Heavens and earth?”
> Ibrahim (Q14:10)

Knowledge of Allah is so basic in human hearts and minds that denying Him is like denying the sun at noontime or the air we breathe. Every *fitrah* (innate nature) naturally recognizes Allah and his oneness; we seek Him by our nature. It recognizes that there is someone great and wise behind its existence and the existence of the universe it is in; this knowledge points without fail to its Creator. If we also factor in the sending of the Messengers of Allah and the messages—with all of their clear proofs and arguments—we would understand *shirk* as the unjust rejection of the plainest truth in existence. This is the reason why atheism was, and still is, a minority position on this earth: it goes against our DNA, heart, psychology, and common sense.

Shirk also leads to the greatest corruption on this earth. Allah the Most Wise says:

> وَمِنَ ٱلنَّاسِ مَن يُعْجِبُكَ قَوْلُهُۥ فِى ٱلْحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنْيَا
> وَيُشْهِدُ ٱللَّهَ عَلَىٰ مَا فِى قَلْبِهِۦ وَهُوَ أَلَدُّ ٱلْخِصَامِ ﴿٢٠٤﴾
> وَإِذَا تَوَلَّىٰ سَعَىٰ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ لِيُفْسِدَ فِيهَا وَيُهْلِكَ ٱلْحَرْثَ
> وَٱلنَّسْلَ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ ٱلْفَسَادَ ﴿٢٠٥﴾

> And of the people is one whose speech pleases you in the world, and he makes Allah a witness as to what is in his heart, yet he is the fiercest of opponents. And when he goes away, he strives to spread corruption throughout the land and destroy crops and animals. And Allah does not like corruption.
>
> Al-Baqarah (Q2:204–205)

This state of disbelief that Allah describes is tied to corruption on this earth. When a person with *shirk* does not observe Allah's rights, they are much less likely to observe humanity's rights. If one does not honor the One who has done him the greatest good, how can he possibly honor anyone else?

As *shirk* spreads the greatest corruption on this earth, it does the same with the hearts. As explained in *Hadith Fifteen*, when Allah is not the Master of this world, the heart is infested with base desires, doubts, and diseases. *Shirk* acts as the breeding ground for all types of illnesses, like cancer spreading from one limb to the next, corrupting everything in its path. This is why there is no remedy for major shirk except repentance in this life, which acts as the extraction of this disease from heart and body. But while it is still inside, it spreads enough corruption to eliminate any hope of survival. Because of the great offense and corruption of *shirk*, Allah does not forgive it in the Hereafter. (There are exceptions to this rule, as when one hasn't received the message of Allah, news of the truth didn't reach them, or they couldn't comprehend it. In these cases, Allah will test these individuals in the Hereafter and this will decide their fate.)

As *shirk* is the major cause for entry into Hellfire, *tawhid* is the major cause of entry into Heaven and safety from Hell. But is it simply a sentence that we repeat or is it a lot more?

Truly from their heart

Humans often say what they don't mean and believe. Sometimes their belief in something is tentative and weak, yet they affirm it in public with great passion. Though these statements may appear to be solid on the surface, they lack certainty that can withstand further probing and tests. If our heart is not behind what we say, the heart will fail our declarations when it is put under pressure. Any true statement must have the support of both heart and tongue.

The *hadith* explains that the great statement of *tawhid* must also emanate from our hearts for it to save us from Hell. "Truly from their heart" means certainty of belief, devotion to it, and love for it and because of it. It comes from every corner in the heart, from its innermost to declare that it has no lord, master, deity, and object of worship but Allah. The involvement of the heart transforms this from a simple verbal utterance into an emotional commitment that opens the gates of Jannah and closes shut the gates of Jahannam.

Several *hadiths* explain that the statement of la ilah illa Allah must meet some conditions for it to bring about these great benefits. Honesty, sincerity, commitment to it, and firm belief in it are all conditions for this statement to be an honest statement and not superficial words on the tongue. The Prophet ﷺ said:

«أسعَدُ الناسِ بشَفاعَتي يومَ القيامةِ مَن قال لا إلهَ إلا اللهُ خالصًا من قلبِه أو نفسِه»

رواه البخاري (٩٩).

> «The happiest person with my intercession on the Day of Judgment is the one who says *La ilah illa Allah* sincerely from their heart or self.»
>
> Reported by al-Bukhari (99).

He ﷺ also said:

> «ما من أحدٍ يشهد أن لا إله إلا الله وأن محمدًا رسولُ اللهِ صدقًا من قَلْبِهِ إلا حرمهُ اللهُ على النارِ»
>
> رواه البخاري (١٢٨).
>
> «There is no one who testifies that there is no one worthy of worship except Allah and that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah truly from their heart except that Allah would save them from Hellfire.»
>
> Reported by al-Bukhari (128).

And he ﷺ also said:

> «من لقيتَ من وراءِ هذا الحائطَ يشهدُ أن لا إلهَ إلَّا اللَّهُ مستيقِنًا بها قلبُهُ فبشِّرْهُ بالجنَّة»
>
> رواه مسلم (٣١).
>
> «Whoever you meet behind this wall, testifying with certainty in their heart that there is no one worthy of worship except Allah, then give them the good news of Paradise.»
>
> Reported by Muslim (31).

Note how these *hadiths* emphasize the role of the heart in the affirmation and acceptance of the statement of *tawhid*. The more entrenched and established this statement is in our hearts, the closer it would take us to Allah and the greater our reward. When this statement settles in our hearts, it saves the rest of the body from the corruption of *shirk*, doubts, and destructive desires. It saves us from Hell.

Tawhid saves from Hellfire

Tawhid is the key to Paradise: Jannah won't open for us without *tawhid*. It is also our protection from Hellfire: we won't enter Jahannam or last in it with *tawhid* in our hearts.

The strength of *tawhid* in the hearts determines whether we are saved from punishment entirely or eventually after we've first been purified from sin in Hellfire. With regard to the power of this statement in forgiving all sins, the Prophet ﷺ said:

> «إنَّ اللهَ سيُخَلِّصُ رجلًا من أمتي على رؤوسِ الخلائقِ يومَ القيامة فينشُرُ عليه تسعةً وتسعينَ سِجِلًّا كلُّ سِجِلٍّ مثلُ مدِّ البصرِ ثم يقولُ (أتُنكِرُ من هذا شيئًا؟ أظلَمَكَ كَتَبتي الحافظونَ؟) يقولُ (لا يا ربِّ) فيقولُ (أفلَكَ عُذرٌ؟) فيقولُ (لا يا ربِّ) فيقولُ (بلى إنَّ لكَ عندنا حسنةً وإنَّه لا ظلمَ عليكَ اليومَ) فيُخرَجُ بِطاقةٌ فيها: (أشهدُ أنْ لا إلهَ إلا اللهُ وأشهدُ أنَّ محمدًا عبدُه ورسولُه) فيقولُ (احضُرْ وزنَكَ) فيقولُ (يا ربِّ ما هذهِ البِطاقةُ معَ هذه السِّجِلَّاتِ؟) فقال (فإنك لا تُظلَمُ) قال فتوضعُ السِّجِلَّاتُ في كِفَّةٍ والبطاقةُ في كِفَّةٍ فطاشتِ السِّجِلَّاتُ وثقُلتِ البِطاقةُ ولا يَثقُلُ معَ اسمِ اللهِ شيءٌ»
>
> رواه أحمد (٦٩٩٤) والترمذي (٢٦٣٩) وصححه أحمد شاكر والألباني (صحيح الترمذي ٢٦٣٩).
>
> «Indeed Allah will distinguish a man from my Ummah from all of creation on the Day of Judgment. Ninety-nine scrolls will be laid out for him, each scroll is as far as the eye can see. He will then be asked: "Do you deny any of this? Did my trusted scribes wrong you?" He will say: "No, O Lord."

> He will say: “Do you have an excuse?” He will say: “No, O Lord.” So He will say: “Yes, you have a good deed with us, so you shall not be treated unjustly today.” Then a card will be brought out that has on it “I testify that there is no one worthy of worship except Allah and I testify that Muhammad is His slave and Messenger.” He will say: “Attend your weigh in.” He will say: “O Lord, what good is this card next to these scrolls?” He will say: “You shall not be wronged.” Then the scrolls will be put on a pan of the scale and the card on the other pan, and the scrolls will be light and the card will be heavy. Nothing is heavier than the Name of Allah.»
>
> Reported by Ahmad (6994) and al-Tirmidhi (2639) and declared *sahih* by Ahmad Shakir and al-Albani (*Sahih al-Tirmidhi*, 2639).

Every Muslim has this testimony that this man has and all of us have sins, but not every Muslim will be forgiven for his sins like this man will be. The difference was this man’s commitment to *tawhid* and love for it. The heavier our card gets, the more sins it will erase.

The statement of *tawhid* can also protect us from Hell if it is the last thing we say before we die. The Prophet ﷺ said:

> «من كان آخر كلامه لا إله إلا الله دخل الجنة»
>
> رواه أبو داود (٣١١٦) وصححه الألباني (صحيح أبي داود ٣١١٦).
>
> «The one whose last statement is *La ilah illa Allah* will enter Jannah.»
>
> Reported by Abu Dawud (3116) and al-Albani declared it *sahih* (*Sahih Abi Dawud*, 3116).

This person is able to utter these words just before his death, and this will forgive his sins and take him to Paradise. It is the sincerity of this individual and true allegiance to this statement that make it easy for him to make it his last words before his death.

As for those Muslims who will enter Hell, the statement of *tawhid* and the *iman* in their hearts will save them.

> «يخرجُ منَ النَّارِ من قالَ لا إلَهَ إلَّا اللَّهُ وَكانَ في قلبِهِ منَ الخيرِ ما يَزِنُ شعيرةً ثمَّ يخرجُ منَ النَّارِ من قال لا إله إلَّا اللَّهُ وَكانَ في قلبِهِ منَ الخيرِ ما يزنُ برَّةً ثمَّ يَخرجُ منَ النَّارِ من قالَ لا إلَهَ إلَّا اللَّهُ وَكانَ في قلبِهِ منَ الخيرِ ما يزنُ ذرَّةً»
>
> رواه مسلم (١٩٣).
>
> (Whoever says *La ilaha illa Allah* and has good in their heart equal to the weight of a grain of barley will leave Hellfire. Whoever says *La ilaha illa Allah* and has good in their heart equal to the weight of a grain of wheat will leave Hellfire. Whoever says *La ilaha illa Allah* and has good in their heart equal to the weight of an ant [or a speck] will leave Hellfire.)
>
> Reported by Muslim (193).

The barley grain is heavier than the wheat grain, and the wheat grain is heavier than the ant (or speck). The heavier *iman* and *tawhid* are in our hearts, the faster they rescue us from Hell. And if they are heavy enough, they will save us from Hell entirely.

The hearts need Allah more than they need anything else. And when we give them this knowledge and love, they would not want to exchange it for anything else. Opening our hearts for Allah brings the greatest peace to our hearts and chases their diseases one by one, in proportion to our commitment to Allah. No heart can be reformed without *tawhid*, and no spiritual disease can withstand the brightest light of *La ilaha illa Allah*.

HADITH NINETEEN

الحديث التاسع عشر

Loving the Prophet and the heart

قالَ رسول الله ﷺ: «مَنْ صَلَّى عَلَيَّ مِنْ أُمَّتي صَلاةً مُخلِصًا مِن قَلبِه صَلَّى اللهُ عَليهِ بِها عَشْرَ صَلَواتٍ ورَفَعَهُ بِها عَشْرَ دَرَجاتٍ وكَتَبَ لهُ بِها عَشْرَ حَسَناتٍ ومَحا عَنهُ عَشْرَ سَيِّئاتٍ»

رواه النسائي في اليوم والليلة والطبراني في معجمه الكبير والبخاري في تاريخه وصححه الألباني (صحيح الترغيب ١٦٥٩).

The Messenger ﷺ said: «The one who offers *salah* for me from my Ummah, sincerely from their heart, Allah will then offer ten *salahs* for them, will raise them ten degrees, write for them ten good deeds, and cancel for them ten sins.»

Reported by al-Nasa'i in *al-Yawm wa al-Laylah* and al-Tabarani in *al-Mu'jam al-Kabir* and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Targhib*, 1659).

Commentary

Allah loves His Prophet ﷺ, and honors those who honor him. Our love for him ﷺ is a reflection of the great role he played in delivering the message of guidance to us, his sacrifices along the way, and his devoutness and piety. Loving the Prophet ﷺ is a great act of worship that brings us closer to Allah, His Mercy, and His Forgiveness. The heart that sincerely praises the Prophet ﷺ incorporates into it the healing love of the greatest human who has ever lived.

The virtue of the Prophet ﷺ

He is the best of the children of Adam, as he ﷺ stated in a *hadith*:

> «أنا سيِّدُ ولدِ آدمَ يومَ القيامةِ وأوَّل من ينشقُّ عنه القبرُ وأوَّل شافعٍ وأوَّلُ مُشفَّعٍ»
>
> رواه مسلم (٢٢٧٨).

> «I am the best of the children of Adam on the Day of Judgment, and the first one to rise up from the grave, and the first interceder, and the first one whose intercession will be accepted.»
>
> Reported by Muslim (2278).

He was the best human to ever worship Allah the Most High and the most beloved to Him; this summarizes his excellence. He was extremely devout and humble, so disinclined towards this world and its attractions. He gave away whatever wealth he had to the needy as if he was a wealthy king, yet lived on dates and water for months. He would stand in prayer for hours each night, crying at times until his tears wet the ground beneath him. He never avenged himself or sought personal retribution but forgave and recommended forgiveness. He met his Companions with a smiley face and was their partner in their hardships, and for that they loved him more than they loved themselves and families. He left the comfort of family, home, and country for the sake of preaching the message of Islam. In the process, he lost family members, peace of mind, personal safety, house and hometown, many Companions and friends, and endured contestant attacks on his reputation, person, and family.

We owe him the delivery of the message of Islam. He did not rest until this message reached every corner of Arabia. He was relentless in his *daʿwah*: talking to everyone and repeating his advice until they began to see the truth. He did not leave until he taught his Ummah everything that will bring them closer to Allah and warned them against anything that will take them away from Him. He demonstrated how to be a pious worshiper of Allah in all aspects of his personal and public life, and Allah made him an example and a model: whatever the Prophet ﷺ commanded became an obligation or Sunnah, and whatever he prohibited became *haram* or disliked. Mimicking his piety and worship became a meritorious act that Allah rewards. He was the path to Allah; every other path is closed but the path of Muhammad ﷺ.

He was so concerned with the salvation of his Ummah that he wept at night for their sake until Allah promised him that he will be happy with his *Ummah’s* fate on that day. He saved his one guaranteed *du‘a* for intercession on the Day of Judgment. The worship of Allah was what he loved the most in this life. He loved Allah with all his heart that it left no space in it for other *khullah* (deep and intense love), though his heart was big enough to love everyone. And when he was given a choice between staying in this world and joining his Creator, he readily chose to be with Allah, whom he called the Highest Companion.

He remains a religious, moral, and ethical inspirations for millions upon millions of people for a millennium and a half, each seeking inspiration from him on how to be closer to Allah and live a noble life. This is who Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was, in few words that will always fail to capture how incredible the real person was.

The meaning of salah

Salah in the Arabic language basically means *du‘a*. But the meaning also varies based on who is making the *salah*. *Salah* from Allah is His praise for a person before the angels, which includes increased honor, rank, mercy, and forgiveness. *Salah* from the angels is their *du‘a* for a person and their asking for forgiveness and *barakah* for him. And *Salah* done by humans is their *du‘a*.

When we are making *salah* for the Prophet ﷺ, we would be asking

Allah to honor him and elevate his position and rank in this life and the next. In this life, we would be praying for Allah to elevate his name and reputation, to make his religion prominent and strong. And in the Hereafter, we would be praying to Allah to grant him the highest degree of intercession, to increase his reward and position in Jannah, and to show all creation his virtue and honor. As for *salam* upon the Prophet, it is also a *du‘a* for his safety in this life and in the next: safety for his *da‘wah*, Ummah, and reputation from any harm and the establishment of *barakah* for them; it is also his safety in the grave and Day of Judgment from any harm. The *salam* may also refer to Allah's name. So when we say *assalam alayka*, we mean may Allah (Assalam) protect you and take care of you (see *al-Qawl al-Badi‘ fi al-Salah ‘ala al-Habib al-Shafi‘* by al-Sakhawi).

Allah commands us to say *salah* and *salam* upon the Prophet ﷺ when he says:

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ وَمَلَٰٓئِكَتَهُۥ يُصَلُّونَ عَلَى ٱلنَّبِيِّۚ يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ
ءَامَنُوا۟ صَلُّوا۟ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلِّمُوا۟ تَسْلِيمًا ٥٦

> Indeed Allah and His angels offer *salah* to the Prophet. O you who have *iman*, offer *salah* for him and *salam*.
>
> Al-Ahzab (Q33:56)

If Allah and the angels make *salah* for the Prophet ﷺ, we ought to make this *du‘a* for him too. We make this *du‘a* especially because of what we owe him and because of the direct benefit we receive from this *du‘a*: rewards, protection, and honor from Allah.

The reward of the salah

The *hadith* brings the good news that one *salah* from us for the Prophet ﷺ earns us ten from Allah. It brings elevation of rank in Paradise: ten levels of it, adds ten good deeds, and removes ten sins. All this for one *salah*! But the condition is that it must come from a sincere heart, from the bottom of our hearts. It is pronounced with feelings and love, with recognition of his favors and our duty to follow and honor him. This *salah* flows naturally from the heart to the tongue, sincerely asking Allah to repay the Prophet who is the cause of our entry to Heaven. This type of *salah* expresses true love for the Prophet ﷺ, identification with his religion, and gratitude for what he did. It comes from feeling that every time we follow him, we are several steps closer to Allah. This *salah* emanates from love and intense connection to him. This *salah* brings us closer to him every time we say it. The Prophet ﷺ said:

«المرءُ مع من أحبَّ يومَ القيامةِ»

رواه الترمذي (٣٥٣٥) وحسنه الألباني (صحيح الترمذي ٣٥٣٥).

> «One will be with those whom he loves on the Day of Judgment.»
>
> Reported by al-Tirmidhi (3535) and declared *hasan* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Tirmidhi*, 3535).

This *salah* brings us more of this love, and it will bring us closer to him on the Last Day. The Prophet ﷺ said:

«إنَّ أولى الناسِ بي يومَ القيامةِ أكثرُهم عليَّ صلاةً»

رواه الترمذي (٤٨٤) وابن حبان (٩١١) وحسنه لغيره الألباني (صحيح الترغيب ١٦٦٨).

> «The ones closest to me on the Day of Judgment are the ones with most *salah* for me.»
>
> Reported by al-Tirmidhi (484) and Ibn Hibban (911) and declared *hasan lighayrihi* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Targhib*, 1668).

The heart that loves the Prophet ﷺ will naturally be one that remembers him most. This heart is the keenest one to follow his example and the one that longs the most to see him and be close to him on the

Last Day.

Salah for the Prophet ﷺ forgives sin and removes distress. When Ubay ibn Kaʿb inquired with the Prophet ﷺ about how much of his *duʿa* should be devoted to *salah* for the Prophet and then stated that he will make it his entire *duʿa*, the Prophet ﷺ said:

«إذًا تُكْفَى هَمَّكَ ويُغفرَ لَكَ ذنبُكَ»

رواه الترمذي (٢٤٥٧) وحسنه الألباني (صحيح الترمذي ٢٤٥٧).

> «Then your worries will be removed and your sin will be forgiven.»
>
> Reported by al-Tirmidhi (2457) and declared *hasan* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Tirmidhi*, 2457).

Each heart needs a model

All of our hearts are looking for models to emulate, to inspire them. As there is no heart without a deity to worship, no heart survives without a model. The health of the heart depends on the soundness of this model and its teachings on life and our place in it. If the model is corrupt, the heart will import this corruption into its belief system and actions. Those who fail to adopt the Prophet ﷺ as their example will have to look for and adopt another. There is no escaping this reality. We either choose the Prophet ﷺ or we choose another. But no one can take us to Allah except him.

As with loving Allah, loving the Prophet ﷺ is medicine to the hearts. The Prophet ﷺ taught us how to develop pious hearts that are firmly connected to Allah. All of his commands and counsels are there to grow our spirituality and preserve it from setbacks and contaminations. What he teaches is not the result of limited earthly experience or personal preference but is the direct inspiration and guidance from Allah. This is why when the heart loves the Prophet more than any other human, it would have connected itself to the only man who can truly guide it to Allah, to the only man who can answer its questions. This is why loving and following the Prophet ﷺ is the great medicine of the hearts.

HADITH TWENTY

الحديث العشرون

The excellence of the purified heart

قِيلِ لرسولِ اللهِ ﷺ (أَيُّ النَّاسِ أفضلُ؟) قال «كُلُّ مَخْمومِ القَلبِ صَدوقِ اللِّسانِ» قالوا (صدوقُ اللسانِ نَعرِفُه فما مخمومُ القلبِ؟) قالَ «هُوَ التَّقِيُّ النَّقِيُّ لا إِثْمَ فِيهِ ولا بَغْيَ ولا غِلَّ ولا حَسَدَ»

رواه ابن ماجه (٣٤١٦) وصحح اسناده المنذري والعراقي والبوصيري وصححه الألباني (صحيح ابن ماجه ٣٤١٦).

The Messenger ﷺ was asked: "Who is the best of people?" He said «Everyone with a *makhmum* [clean] heart and truthful tongue.» They asked: "We know the truthful tongue but what is a *makhmum* heart?" He answered «It is the pious and pure one with no sin, aggression, hatred, and envy in it.»

Reported by Ibn Majah (3416) and declared *sahih* by al-Mundhiri, al-Iraqi, al-Busayri, and al-Albani (*Sahih ibn Majah*, 3416).

Commentary

All of us have an innate desire to be the best or among the best. The best in the sight of Allah are the ones who take care of their hearts and *iman* and draw nearer to Allah in sincere worship. The one who is seeking Allah's love and rewards must strive foremost to reform their heart, and they will be among the people whom Allah loves the most.

Asking about the best of people

The first thing we see in this *hadith* is the desire of the Companions to know and understand the best of deeds. This desire doesn't simply stem from curiosity but from the intention to know and to implement these excellent qualities. This is what motivated the Companions to ask questions: implementation. They would ask the Prophet ﷺ about the greatest sins so they can avoid them and about the *fitnah*s of the future so they can be ready for them. As long as these are the motivations for our inquiries and investigations, they will be beneficial. There are, however, questions that are motivated by mere curiosity. In these cases, one desires to know for the fun of it, not ready to practice what they will learn. This line of inquiry is common, especially when the topic is juicy or related to current controversies, and there is typically little benefit in this knowledge. Asking questions in Islam has its etiquette: we should ask about what brings us benefit and what we intend to practice. Questions, especially when frequent and with no practical benefit, are discouraged. The least of their harm is that they are distracting and waste time. And with repetition, they lead to more harm than good. The Prophet ﷺ said about what Allah hates:

> «وَيَكْرَهُ لَكُمْ قِيلَ وَقَالَ وَكَثْرَةَ السُّؤَالِ وَإِضَاعَةِ الْمَالِ»
>
> رواه مسلم (١٧١٥).

> «And Allah hates for you to speak about what was said and what he said, too many questions, and wasting money.»
>
> Reported by Muslim (1715).

The first thing Allah hates in this *hadith* is to discuss people's affairs and stories, which bring no benefit. The second thing Allah hates, as al-Nawawi explains in his commentary on this *hadith* in *Sahih Muslim*, is asking questions about what did not happen yet or where there is no benefit in knowing. He also adds that the Prophet ﷺ criticized questions of this sort and the early Muslims disliked this type of unnecessary inquiry. The Prophet ﷺ said:

> «مَا نَهَيْتُكُمْ عَنْهُ فَاجْتَنِبُوهُ وَمَا أَمَرْتُكُمْ بِهِ فَأْتُوا مِنْهُ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ فَإِنَّمَا أَهْلَكَ
> الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ كَثْرَةُ مَسَائِلِهِمْ وَاخْتِلَافُهُمْ عَلَى أَنْبِيَائِهِمْ»
>
> رواه البخاري (٧٢٨٨) ومسلم (١٣٣٧).
>
> «Avoid what I forbid you to do and do what I command you to do to the best of your ability. For indeed, what ruined the people before you was their excessive questions and their disobedience of their prophets.»
>
> Reported by al-Bukhari (7288) and Muslim (1337).

Note in this *hadith* how the Prophet ﷺ advises us to make our focus the implementation of our knowledge and not frivolous questions. He ﷺ explained that excessive questions, when not originating from a desire for practice, are tied to the disobedience of the Prophets. Islam does not prohibit legitimate questions. What Islam discourages is losing focus and asking not for learning but for unhelpful ulterior motives. Before any question, we should ask ourselves first: "How is this going to bring me closer to Allah?"

Makhmum heart

The word *makhmum* in Arabic means cleansed. It is said *khamma al-bayt* to mean he swept the house from dust and dirt. So, a heart that is *makhmum* is one that has been cleaned and purified. The image is a pertinent one as we will explain shortly.

The Sahabah most likely understood what the word *makhmum* in Arabic meant, and they were not asking about its lexical definition. Rather, they were asking about how the purity of this heart can be reached and from what it needs to be cleaned. The Prophet ﷺ then explained the state of this cleansed heart and listed the diseases from which it is free.

Taqwa is the first feature of this clean heart. *Taqwa* is the basis of any *tazkiyah* process since it includes following Allah's commands and staying away from His prohibitions. Doing what Allah asked us to do, despite obstacles, increases the *taqwa* of the hearts as Allah the All-Knowing said:

إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ يَغُضُّونَ أَصْوَٰتَهُمْ عِندَ رَسُولِ ٱللَّهِ أُو۟لَـٰٓئِكَ
ٱلَّذِينَ ٱمْتَحَنَ ٱللَّهُ قُلُوبَهُمْ لِلتَّقْوَىٰ ۚ

Indeed, those who lower their voices in front of the Messenger
of Allah are those whose hearts Allah has tested for *taqwa*.
Al-Hujurat (Q49:3)

Compliance creates and enhances *taqwa* in the hearts, and Allah tested their hearts with this requirement to see who will comply. The more we follow Allah's commands, the more *taqwa* we will have in our hearts. It is to sense that Allah is watching us and is with us at all times; it is this love and awe that develops in our heart for Allah to prevent us from straying from His path; and it is the purity of heart that doesn't tolerate the distance sin creates between us and Allah.

The second feature of the clean heart is its purity, and it is its purity that protects it from sin, desire for aggression, hatred, and envy. This heart keeps resisting the temptations of Shaytan and clings to Allah's worship, seeking Allah's protection along the way. This heart struggles against worldly preoccupations and attachments, extracts them from its center, and places Allah there instead. By no means would this be something easy or quick to accomplish: it takes time and persistent effort. But when the heart starts to care less about this world, to care more about the Hereafter, and to stay away from *haram*, it builds a stronger and more intimate relationship with Allah. When this heart receives the certainty that it is Allah alone that distributes the favors of this world according to His wisdom, this heart starts shedding its envious nature, understanding that each receives their worldly portion according to a grand plan. In addition, its preoccupation with the Hereafter and avoidance of *haram* leaves little room to worry about the triviality of this world and who got what, especially when it gets to know that more of this world means less in the Hereafter. The Prophet ﷺ said:

> «مَنْ أحبَّ دُنْياهُ أَضَرَّ بِآخِرَتِه ومَنْ أحبَّ آخِرَتَهُ أَضرَّ بِدُنْياهُ فَآثِرُوا ما يَبْقَى على ما يَفْنَى»
>
> أخرجه ابن حبان (٧٠٩) وصححه الألباني (صحيح الترغيب ٣٢٤٧).
>
> «The one who loves his world will harm his Hereafter, and the one who loves his Hereafter will harm his world. So favor that which lasts over that which doesn't.»
>
> Reported by Ibn Hibban (709) and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Targhib*, 3247).

The heart that understands this will no longer be angry because of what it doesn't have, and it won't desire harm for others out of envy or jealousy; it knows that what has been kept away from it awaits it in the next life. This heart learns to be more forgiving because it desires forgiveness from Allah, and it sees itself as a humble and poor sinner before its Creator. One in such state isn't arrogant and doesn't see that he has rights upon others but is happy with what he receives from people and asks Allah for more of His favors. This heart sympathizes with others' weaknesses and helps them transcend their infractions and mistakes. It will care about the bigger picture, its final destiny in Heaven or Hell, more than quarrels and disagreements about this and that in this world.

This type of heart is the product of constant work. The image that *khamma* conjures is cleaning a house from dust, and this is nonstop work if one wants to keep a clean house. As we diligently remove garbage and dirt from our homes and mop and polish them, we need to pay even greater attention to cleaning our hearts and removing every disease and sin from them on a daily basis. Purification on a daily basis may seem impractical for some. But it is possible if we start paying greater attention to our daily worship, with accretion of devotion as time goes by. Start, be sincere, seek Allah's assistance, and Allah will help you.

One of the ways to keep a sound and peaceful heart is to filter the information that makes its way to it. The following—though not a strong *hadith*—offers sound advice as Shaykh Ibn Othaymin wrote (*Tafsir Surah al-Nisa'*, vol. 2, p. 445):

> قال ﷺ: «لا يُبَلِّغُنِي أحدٌ عن أحدٍ من أصحابي شيئًا فإني أُحِبُّ أن أخرجَ إليهم وأنا سليمُ الصدرِ» قال عبدُ اللهِ (فأُتِيَ بمالٍ فقَسَّمه النبيُّ صلَّى اللهُ عليه وسلَّم فانتَهَيْتُ إلى رَجُلَيْنِ جالِسَيْنِ وهما يقولانِ ((واللهِ ما أراد مُحَمَّدٌ بقِسْمَتِهِ التي قَسَمَها وجهَ اللهِ ولا الدارَ الآخِرةَ)) فتَثَبَّتُّ حين سَمِعْتُها فأَتَيْتُ رسولَ اللهِ صلَّى اللهُ عليه وسلَّم فأَخْبَرْتُه فاحْمَرَّ وجهُه وقال: «دَعْنِي عنكَ فقد أُوذِيَ موسى بأكثرَ من هذا فصبر»)
>
> رواه أبو داود (٤٨٦٠) الترمذي (٣٨٩٦) وضعفه الألباني (ضعيف الترمذي ٣٨٩٦).
>
> «No one should convey to me anything about any of my Companions, for I love that I should go out to them with my breast at peace.» Abdullah said: "The Messenger of Allah ﷺ was brought some money, so the Prophet ﷺ distributed it. Then I came across two men that were sitting saying: 'By Allah, Muhammad did not intend the Face of Allah with his distribution nor the Hereafter.' So I made sure of what I heard

> and went to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and I informed him. And his face became red and said: ‘Do not bother me with this, for Musa was harmed with more than this and he was patient.’”
>
> Reported by Abu Dawud (4860) and al-Tirmidhi (3896) and declared weak by al-Albani (*Da‘if al-Tirmidhi*, 3896).

The news that we receive about people plays a significant role in shaping our emotions and attitudes. It is difficult to maintain a clean heart after hearing something disturbing about another, especially if it is hateful. When there is no benefit in it, it is best to stay unaware so our heart does not get occupied with negative thoughts and dark emotions. Likewise, controlling the amount and quality of information we allow in (e.g. TV, Internet, social media, and gossip) enables us to direct our hearts to what’s most beneficial and to filter out negative and unnecessary cogitation. This is especially tricky in an age of massive flow of information, but it can be done *insha-Allah* with careful and persistent planning. Our hearts deserve this much care.

Truthful tongue

The best and most pious person, according to the *hadith*, has a cleansed heart and a truthful tongue. This points to the fact that his tongue and body are in unison with his heart. The *hadith* in a way refutes the notion of a gap between heart and body, where one can claim purity of heart without corresponding external purity. This person holds on to the truth in whatever he says, which would not be possible without a heart full of *iman*. Similarly, the dishonesty of the tongue reflects the deficiencies of the heart. We will have more to say about the connection between heart and tongue in *Hadith Thirty-Two* in this book (don’t skip there yet!).

Honesty of tongue means that this person only speaks the truth when making promises, describing past and present events, and offering testimony about himself and others. Honesty also means that he shares only the truth and what is pleasing to Allah and avoids unverified information and dubious religious knowledge. Honesty of tongue can actually be summarized to mean that he speaks only what is pleasing to Allah and refrains from what upsets Him.

Who is next?

The inquiry of the Companions did not stop with the best but continued to ask about the second and third best.

> زاد البيهقي في شعب الإيمان (٤٤٦): قلنا (يا رسولَ اللهِ فمَن على أَثَرِهِ؟) قال «الذي يَشْنَأُ الدُّنيا ويُحِبُّ الآخِرَةَ» قلنا (ما نعرف هذا فينا إلا رافعٌ مَولى رسولِ اللهِ فمن على أثَرِه؟) قال «مؤمنٌ في خُلُقٍ حَسَن» قلنا (أمَّا هذه فإنها فينا).
>
> صححه الألباني (صحيح الترغيب ٢٩٣١).
>
> We said: "O Messenger of Allah, then who?" He said: «The one who hates this world and loves the Hereafter.» We said: "We don't know that in one except in Rafiʿ the servant of the Messenger of Allah. Then who?" He said: «A believer with good manners.» They said: "As for this, it is in us."
>
> Reported by al-Bayhaqi in *Shuʿab al-Iman* (446) and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Targhib*, 2931).

The second level belongs to those who are inclined to the Hereafter and have left the glamor of this world and its sparkle behind. Their hatred of the world does not mean that they hate the *halal* that Allah had made lawful and a blessing for them. Rather, it means that they hate the excesses of this world, its distractions that take us away from Allah, and always put the Hereafter first. They realize the reality of this world, so they are no longer tempted by it: they realize the harm in its indulgence and they flee from it. They are children of the Hereafter and not of this world. The one the Companions identified as fitting this description was Abu Rafi‘ who was a slave of al-Abbas, the uncle of the Prophet ﷺ. Al-Abbas gave him to the Prophet ﷺ who in turn freed him.

The third and last level of the most excellent of people are those who combine *iman* with good character, which in itself is a lofty position if one can reach it. These three levels can become ladder steps on our path of *tazkiyah*. We can work on improving our *iman* and character as the first step in changing ourselves. We follow this with increased devotion to the Hereafter and greater detachment from the *dunya*. This level will help us—by the permission of Allah—to truly purify our hearts and adhere to the truth in both speech and action.

The superiority of the cleansed heart

The *hadith* is unequivocal in the great virtue of *tazkiyah*. Heart purification raises us to the highest levels in Jannah and brings us closest to Allah. What Allah wants most from us is the sincerity, *iman*, devotion, and purity of our hearts. If this is what Allah cares about most and rewards the most, we ought to pay the greatest attention to it. May Allah helps us do so.

HADITH TWENTY-ONE

الحديث الواحد والعشرون

Bring tranquility to your heart

قُلتُ لأمِّ سَلَمَةَ (يا أمَّ المؤمنينَ ما كانَ أكْثرُ دعاءِ رسولِ اللَّهِ ﷺ إذا كانَ عندَكِ؟) قالَت (كانَ أَكْثرُ دعائِهِ: «يا مُقلِّبَ القُلوبِ ثَبِّتْ قلبي على دينِكَ» قالَت فقُلتُ (يا رسولَ اللَّهِ ما لأكثرِ دُعاءِكَ «يا مُقلِّبَ القلوبِ ثبِّت قلبي على دينِكَ»؟) قالَ «يا أُمَّ سلمةَ إنَّهُ لَيسَ آدميٌّ إلَّا وقلبُهُ بينَ أُصْبُعَيْنِ من أَصابعِ اللَّهِ فمَن شاءَ أقامَ ومن شاءَ أزاغَ» فتلا معاذٌ [أحد رواة الحديث] ﴿رَبَّنَا لَا تُزِغْ قُلُوبَنَا بَعْدَ إِذْ هَدَيْتَنَا﴾ [آل عمران: ٨].

رواه الترمذي (٣٥٢٢) وحسنه وصححه الألباني (صحيح الترمذي ٣٥٢٢).

Umm Salamah was asked: “What was the most frequent *du‘a* of the Prophet ﷺ when he was with you?” She said: “His most frequent *du‘a* was ‘O Turner of the hearts, make my heart firm upon your religion.’” She said: “O Messenger of Allah, why is ‘O Turner of the hearts, make my heart firm upon your religion’ your most frequent *du‘a*?” He said: ‘O Umm Salamah, there is no human except that their heart is between Two Fingers of the Fingers of Allah, so whomever He wills He makes steadfast, and whomever He wills He leads astray.’” Then Muadh [one of the narrators of the *hadith*] recited: ﴾O Our Rabb, do not lead our hearts astray after you have guided us﴿ [Al-Imran: 8].

Reported by al-Tirmidhi (3522) who declared it *hasan*. Al-Albani declared it *sahih* (*Sahih al-Tirmidhi*, 3522).

Commentary

Realizing the problem is the first step towards securing a solution. One of the first weaknesses we've learned about our hearts in this book is their instability and fluctuations. In the face of this grave frailty, bringing devotion and tranquility to our hearts should be our top priority. And there is no one who can bring this steadfastness to our hearts other than our Creator.

The instability of the heart

Umm Salamah رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهَا is one of the Mothers of the Believers, and privy to the personal worship of the Prophet ﷺ. It was common, as other *hadiths* attest, for the Companions to inquire with the Mothers of the Believers about the worship of the Prophet ﷺ since they knew him best. The Mothers of the Believers acted as teachers and transmitters of knowledge, and they were able to relay to us what male Companions could not. There is important wisdom and lesson here. We each have a role to play in this life, no matter our position in life or how insignificant it may appear to us. When Allah, the Most Wise, assigns each of us a place in society—where this assignment is either religious prescription, such as male and female duties, or worldly reality, such as the degree of our power and influence in society—Allah grants us this area as our tilling field for the Hereafter. If we invest our energy in what Allah gave us, Allah will bless our dedication and spread the benefit of our work. We may tell ourselves that another position in life would have helped us be more and do better. But if we only focus on the good that Allah had given us and not look down on it, Allah will bless us and guide us to what will exceed our desires and expectations.

The question the Companions asked in the *hadith* was a very meaningful one. They wanted to know the most frequent *du'a* of the Prophet ﷺ, or in other words: what did he want most and what was he most concerned about? Imagine if we did not know the answer and the question popped into your head! Wouldn't it be wonderful if we knew what was the most important thing the Prophet ﷺ asked for? Well, we know! And the answer is…it's about the heart and preserving its *iman*. What the Prophet ﷺ worried about the most was the fidelity of his heart to Allah. And if he worried about this and he was the protected Prophet of Allah, how much more should we be worried about it?

We have seen in previous *hadiths* (*Hadith Two*, *Hadith Three*, and *Hadith Five*) the great instability of the heart and the real challenge this presents to our *taqwa* and *iman*. The reasons for the heart's continued fluctuations include our impatience and ignorance, the Shaytan and his incessant whispers, our many weaknesses, and our distance from Allah. The *hadith* makes it crystal clear that it is Allah alone who can save us from this dangerous human condition. He is in control of our hearts as He is in control of everything else. If we desperately need our hearts to recognize the truth and be able to follow it, we have to constantly ask Allah, like the Prophet ﷺ did, to protect us from misguidance and temptations.

Allah guides and misguides, no one has this power but He. Allah is the One who opens certain hearts to the truth and closes others. Allah says:

> فَمَن يُرِدِ ٱللَّهُ أَن يَهۡدِيَهُۥ يَشۡرَحۡ صَدۡرَهُۥ لِلۡإِسۡلَٰمِۖ وَمَن
> يُرِدۡ أَن يُضِلَّهُۥ يَجۡعَلۡ صَدۡرَهُۥ ضَيِّقًا حَرَجٗا كَأَنَّمَا
> يَصَّعَّدُ فِي ٱلسَّمَآءِۚ كَذَٰلِكَ يَجۡعَلُ ٱللَّهُ ٱلرِّجۡسَ عَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ
> لَا يُؤۡمِنُونَ ١٢٥
>
> The one that Allah wants to guide He opens his chest to Islam. And the one He wants to misguide He makes his chest tight and constricted as if he is climbing up to the sky. Thus does Allah place the dirt on those who don't believe.
>
> Al-Anʿam (Q6:125)

If Allah wants to guide someone, He opens their heart to the truth of Islam and *tawhid* and they accept and follow it. But if Allah wants to misguide someone, He doesn't leave space in their heart for the truth, and on top of that, Shaytan becomes the heart's companion with all the filth that he brings. This closure of the heart is a punishment for rejecting the truth and favoring what Allah hates. Allah the Most Merciful says:

> وَنُقَلِّبُ أَفْـِٔدَتَهُمْ وَأَبْصَٰرَهُمْ كَمَا لَمْ يُؤْمِنُوا۟ بِهِۦٓ أَوَّلَ
> مَرَّةٍ وَنَذَرُهُمْ فِى طُغْيَٰنِهِمْ يَعْمَهُونَ ١١٠
>
> And We will turn away their hearts and eyes just as they refused to believe in it the first time. And We will leave them wandering blindly in their transgression.
>
> Al-An'am (Q6:110)

This *ayah* is similar to the *ayah* in *Al Imran* (Q3:8), quoted by one of the narrators of the *hadith*, where the believers were praying to Allah not to misguide them after He had guided them. These believers understood that one can comprehend the truth and recognize it as the truth but have contrary inclinations and weaknesses that lead him—sooner or later— to reject it. If Allah doesn't preserve this person's *iman* and protect him from his own sins, Shaytan may claim him as one of his many victims. Therefore, no one should be deceived by their piety and good works. You never know what will happen before you die.

We should underpin our beliefs about who is guided and misguided in Allah's ultimate Wisdom and Justice. Allah guides those who are ready and open to guidance and misguides those who have chosen the path of disbelief and sin for themselves.

Allah says:

فَأَمَّا مَنْ أَعْطَىٰ وَٱتَّقَىٰ ﴿٥﴾ وَصَدَّقَ بِٱلْحُسْنَىٰ ﴿٦﴾ فَسَنُيَسِّرُهُۥ لِلْيُسْرَىٰ ﴿٧﴾
وَأَمَّا مَنۢ بَخِلَ وَٱسْتَغْنَىٰ ﴿٨﴾ وَكَذَّبَ بِٱلْحُسْنَىٰ ﴿٩﴾ فَسَنُيَسِّرُهُۥ لِلْعُسْرَىٰ ﴿١٠﴾

> As for one who gives and has *taqwa* of Allah and believes in the best reward, We will ease him towards ease. But as for one who withholds and considers himself self-sufficient and denies the best reward, We will ease him towards difficulty.
>
> Al-Layl (Q92:5–10)

In general, the disobedience of Allah leads to greater difficulty, uncertainty, and unreceptiveness to the truth. It is the natural punishment we would earn when we distance ourselves from Allah and give Shaytan the space to ruin our *iman* and life. Every time we are about to commit a sin, we should remember the difficulty, confusion, and sadness this will bring to our lives. We should remember that every sin could be the reason we lose the firmness of *iman* in our hearts.

The uncertainties and ups and downs of our lives need a strong heart, filled with *iman* and trust in Allah to survive life's tests and pressures. The age we live in is an age of rapid *fitnahs* and luring temptations, and we need Allah's help to preserve our faith. The age we live in is one characterized by weak religious commitment and *iman*, a reality that damages our own *iman* and reliance on Allah. Because of all of this, our need for a stable heart is so great and yet it is the latest thing we think about. In the face of these unending waves of tribulations, we need Allah's help.

The Duʻa

The *duʻa* in the *hadith* begins with calling upon Allah with one of His attributes: Turner of the hearts. When we want to ask Allah for something, it is apt to use the name and attribute of Allah that best fits what we are asking for. It is to beg Allah and seek His pleasure by bringing up an attribute of His that praises what we need from Him, asking Him to continue to bless us because it is his Nature and Attribute to bless. For instance, when we say: "O Most Merciful, be merciful with me," we are pleading with Allah and saying: "Since You are the Most Merciful, you love mercy, and it is Your Custom to be Merciful, be merciful with me and include me in Your Mercy." And in the *du'a* of the *hadith* in this chapter, we are pleading with Allah as the One who has full control over our hearts, who can change them as He wishes, to keep them strong with *iman* and protect them from deterioration and relapse.

This attribute of Allah didn't only factor into the most frequent *du'a* of the Prophet ﷺ but also his most frequent oath. Abdullah ibn Umar رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا said:

> قال عبد الله بن عمر رضي الله عنه: (أكثرُ ما كان النبيُّ صلَّى اللهُ عليه وسلَّم يَحلِفُ «لا ومُقَلِّبِ القلوبِ»)
>
> رواه البخاري (٧٣٩١).
>
> The most frequent oath of the Prophet ﷺ was: «No, by the One who turns the hearts.»
>
> Reported by al-Bukhari (7391).

In another *hadith*, he also said:

> قال عبدالله بن عمر رضي الله عنه: (كانت يمينُ النبيِّ صلى الله عليه وسلم «لا ومُقلِّبِ القلوبِ»)
>
> رواه البخاري (٦٦٢٨)
>
> The oath of the Prophet ﷺ was: «No, by the One who turns the hearts.»
>
> Reported by al-Bukhari (6628).

The significance of this divine attribute for humanity cannot be overstated. Our hearts change all the time, and it is only Allah who has complete control over them. If Allah doesn't help us rein in our wild hearts, no one can. Therefore, this attribute of Allah is decisive in our salvation.

Another *hadith* has a slightly different version of the *du‘a*:

> «إنَّ قلوبَ بَني آدمَ كلَّها بينَ إصبَعينِ من أصابعِ الرَّحمنِ كقَلبِ واحِدٍ يصرِفُهُ حيثُ يشاءُ» ثمَّ قالَ رسولُ اللَّهِ صلَّى اللَّهُ عليهِ وسلَّمَ «اللَّهمَّ مُصرِّفَ القلوبِ صرِّف قلوبَنا على طاعتِكَ»
>
> رواه مسلم (٢٦٥٤).
>
> «The hearts of all the children of Adam are between Two Fingers of the Fingers of the Most Merciful as a single heart, turning it to any direction He wishes.» Then the Messenger ﷺ said: «O Allah the Controller of the hearts, turn our hearts to your obedience.»
>
> Reported by Muslim (2654).

We glimpse in this *hadith* of the great Majesty and Power of Allah: all human hearts are like a single heart before Allah, and He moves them as He wishes. The Fingers of the Merciful are part of His great attributes which we believe in as the Prophet ﷺ relayed to us but don't investigate or speculate about their appearance. Allah is greater than anything we have seen or can imagine.

Understanding that Allah is the One who controls the hearts tells us how much we need Him and how helpless we are without Him. The *hadith* reminds us that our hearts can change at any moment, chasing away any semblance of arrogance from the pious and despair from the sinners. This keeps us close to Allah, reliant on Him and not the good work we do. It reminds of the Majesty of Allah and our human weakness: we're not even in control of the hearts in our chests! We are incredibly weak. What power do we really have if Allah is not with us? How do we know right from wrong if Allah doesn't teach us? We can be very smart and educated and yet miss some of the most obvious facts in life. Haven't you seen someone very smart whose family and/or religious life was a mess? There are some who are exceptionally intelligent but choose to move away from Allah, trusting their minds and abilities rather than the guidance of their Creator. Many humans are guided to religious truths and wisdoms that those superior to them in education, intelligence, and wealth have missed. It is not always our abilities and education that matter but the opportunities that Allah grants us and the success He guides to. If Allah seals the heart, our IQ is not going to help us.

This *du'a* is particularly important for anyone who has fallen victim to doubts and worldly temptations and cannot escape them. If we see or listen to something *haram* or disturbing and it keeps invading our heart and wrecking our peace of mind, we can use the *du'a* in this *hadith* to ask Allah to calm our hearts and chase away the whispers of Shaytan. If we are trapped by a particular sin that we cannot escape but want to, we should throw ourselves at the mercy of Allah and plead with Him using this *du'a* to remove this weakness and desire from our hearts and protect us from disobedience. If we have been obeying Allah but started to notice some change of heart (e.g. boredom or lack of interest) and attraction to sin, we should rush to this *du'a* and ask Allah to be our guardian against slippage. If there is some major or even minor *fitnah* going on and we're afraid that we'll get swept by it, we ought to repeat this *du'a*, asking Allah to keep guiding us through the difficult times. Conversely, if we are simply worshiping Allah and are on a religious high, we should remember this *du'a* and plead with Allah not to misguide us after He had guided us. May Allah accept this *du'a* from us. Ameen.

Project

Your first task is to memorize the *du'a* of this chapter and add to it the other version from *Sahih Muslim*. You can repeat both in the following format:

يا مُقلِّبَ القُلوبِ ثَبِّتْ قلبي على دينِكَ يا مُصرِّفَ القلوبِ صَرِّفْ قلبي على طاعتِكَ

After you've memorized it, make it part of your regular *du'a* in *sujud*, the last part of the night, and last hour before sunset on Fridays. Keep repeating this *du'a*, especially when you notice the weakness of *iman* creeping in or you come in contact with a *shubhah/shahwah*. If you are experiencing a specific *fitnah* now, repeat this *du'a* often while also avoiding the specific source of temptation until it leaves your heart and thoughts *insha-Allah*. With enough repetition, this *du'a* will be one of your regular and frequent prayers as it was with Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

HADITH TWENTY-TWO

الحديث الثاني والعشرون

Pray for purification

كانَ رسول الله ﷺ يدعو بهذه الدَّعوات: «اللَّهمَّ إنِّي أَعوذُ بِكَ من فِتنةِ النَّارِ وعَذابِ النَّارِ وفتنةِ القَبرِ وعذابِ القبرِ وشَرِّ فِتنةِ الغِنى وشرِّ فتنةِ الفقرِ اللَّهمَّ إنِّي أعوذُ بكَ من شرِّ فتنةِ المسيحِ الدَّجَّالِ اللَّهمَّ اغسَلْ قلبي بماءِ الثَّلجِ والبَرَدِ ونَقِّ قلبي منَ الخطايا كما نقَّيتَ الثَّوبَ الأبيضَ منَ الدَّنَسِ وباعِدْ بيني وبينَ خَطاياي كما باعَدْتَ بينَ المَشْرقِ والمغربِ اللَّهمَّ إنِّي أعوذُ بكَ منَ الكَسَلِ والمَأْثَمِ والمَغْرَمِ»

رواه البخاري (٦٣٧٧) ومسلم (٥٨٩).

The Messenger ﷺ used to supplicate with these supplications: «O Allah, I seek refuge in You from the trial of Hellfire, from the torment of Hellfire, from the trial of the grave, from the torment of the grave, from the evil of the trial of affluence, and from the evil of the trial of poverty. O Allah, I seek refuge in You from the evil of the turmoil of al-Dajjal. O Allah, wash my heart with snow and hail water, purify my heart from sins as the white garment is purified from dirt, and put a distance between me and my sins like the distance You've put between East and West. O Allah, I seek refuge in You from sloth, sin, and debt.»

Reported by al-Bukhari (6377) and Muslim (589).

Commentary

Du'a is indispensable in the life of a Muslim. After asking Allah to stabilize our hearts in the previous *hadith*, this *hadith* turns to the purification of our hearts. In it, the Prophet ﷺ asks Allah to wash the heart clean of sin and to purify it from disease and imperfections. It is a rich and comprehensive *du'a* that secures our needs in this life and the next.

The importance of du'a

Du'a is the link between us and Allah. The Prophet ﷺ said:

> «الدُّعاءُ هوَ العبادةُ» ثمَّ قالَ ﴿وَقَالَ رَبُّكُمُ ادْعُونِي أَسْتَجِبْ لَكُمْ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ عَنْ عِبَادَتِي سَيَدْخُلُونَ جَهَنَّمَ دَاخِرِينَ﴾ [غافر ٦٠])
>
> رواه أبو داود (١٤٧٩) والترمذي (٣٢٤٧) وصححه الألباني (صحيح الترمذي ٣٢٤٧).
>
> «*Du'a* is worship» and then he recited: ﴿And Your Rabb said "Call on me and I will answer you. Indeed those who are arrogant to worship me shall enter Hell humiliated."﴾ [Ghafir: 60].
>
> Reported by Abu Dawud (1479) and al-Tirmidhi (3247) and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Tirmidhi*, 3247).

Du'a is equated with worship in the *hadith* because of two reasons. First, *du'a* is the best of worship as the Prophet ﷺ said in another *hadith*:

> «أفضلُ العبادةِ الدُّعاءُ»
>
> رواه الحاكم وحسنه الألباني (السلسلة الصحيحة ١٥٧٩).
>
> «The best of worship is *du'a*.»
>
> Reported by al-Hakim and declared *hasan* by al-Albani (*al-Silsilah al-Sahihah*, 1579).

The second reason is that *du'a* encompasses the essence of worship and carries its spirit. *Du'a* demonstrates complete surrender and humility before the Creator, not creation. We admit when we make *du'a* our complete dependence, need, and reliance on Allah. We ascribe to Allah complete power and generosity, and we praise Him for His beautiful attributes and gifts. This is the essence of all worship of Allah, and the more we have of it, the truer slaves of Allah we would be. Since *du'a* is *ibadah*, it is a barometer of our *iman* and connection to Allah. The more *du'a* we make, the closer will we be to Allah. And the closer we are to Allah, the greater our *du'a* will be.

Du'a is a sign of acknowledging our poverty before Allah and recognizing His greatness. When we ask Him, we place our trust in Him instead of ourselves or others. It is a sign that we understand the nature of this world, that we are not blinded or distracted by our desires and worldly glamor. It is a sign that our connection with Allah is alive and well, and that our ultimate desire is His pleasure and Paradise. It is a return to Allah despite all obstacles and temptations. If you find yourself with weak *iman*, one of the quickest things you can do to increase it is to engage in *du'a*. This by itself, when done sincerely and consciously, connects you to Allah and rebuilds your relationship with Him. Maintaining your *du'a* maintains your *iman* and love for Allah. *Du'a* chases away desperation and depression because of our belief that Allah will help us and has the best in store for us. It gives the believer strength to face whatever may come their way, never losing hope in Allah.

The *hadith* lists many of the things we are worried about rather than summing them up in one or two sentences. Listing these hardships reminds the supplicant of the extent of their need for Allah with each disease and problem mentioned. This reaffirms our helplessness and dependence on Allah. It reminds us to keep fearing Allah and honoring Him: He has all the power and we have none.

Hellfire, the grave, al-Dajjal, and wealth

The Prophet ﷺ began this *hadith* with seeking protection from several *fitnahs* (we discussed the meaning of *fitnah* in *Hadith Three*). The entire *hadith* is a prayer to Allah to remove harm and bring their opposites of *iman*, good deeds, good character, and sound heart. It is important to ask Allah for the things we need and desire. Similarly, we should ask Him to protect us from what we fear and steals us away from Allah's path.

The first thing the Prophet ﷺ sought refuge from was the *fitnah* and punishment of Hell. The *fitnah* of Hell can be explained in multiple ways. First, it means all the wrong deeds that lead to Hellfire. Thus, it refers to something that precedes Hell and is not part of it. The second meaning is the angels of Hell interrogating its inhabitants upon entry whether they received a warner or not. Allah says:

كُلَّمَآ أُلۡقِيَ فِيهَا فَوۡجٞ سَأَلَهُمۡ خَزَنَتُهَآ أَلَمۡ يَأۡتِكُمۡ نَذِيرٞ ٨

Every time a company is thrown into it, its keepers ask them:
"Did a warner not come to you?"
Al-Mulk (Q67:8)

This question is one of reproach and castigation, reminding them of the great opportunity they had to believe and escape this pain. Reminding them of this great loss is to increase their regret and sorrow, and to have them admit before everyone that Allah was just with them. This question is one of the *fitnahs* of Hellfire. The third meaning of the *fitnah* of Hellfire is the punishment inside Hellfire, suggesting a special type of punishment in Hell.

The second thing the Prophet ﷺ sought refuge from was the *fitnah* and punishment of the grave. The *fitnah* of the grave is the questioning of the two angels about one's Rabb, religion, and prophet. This is a trying time when Allah supports the faithful with the right answer while the unfaithful stammer and admit their disbelief and ignorance.

The punishment of the grave is the first stage in the punishment of the Hereafter, where disbelievers and certain sinners receive various punishments for their offenses. The grave is the first station of the Hereafter; what happens here foretells what happens after resurrection.

The third *fitnah* the Prophet ﷺ sought refuge from was the temptation of wealth. Wealth and money present us with challenges whether we have them or not. When we have it, wealth breeds stinginess and denial of others' rights (e.g. denying *Zakah* and not supporting family). Love of wealth also leads to greed, which in turn leads to unlawful earning. The *fitnah* of wealth also includes unlawful and irresponsible expenditure, defining ourselves and others by it, and arrogance and rebellion against Allah. On the other hand, poverty presents its own challenges. Poverty leads to envy, humiliation in its pursuit, and seeking it from *haram* sources. Poverty also leads to general impatience with life and Allah, and eventually to loss of faith altogether.

The last *fitnah* the Prophet ﷺ sought refuge from was al-Dajjal, the impostor Messiah who will claim divinity and be killed by Jesus Son of Mary عَلَيۡهِ ٱلسَّلَامُ towards the end of times.

Washing and cleansing the heart

The next major part of the *du'a* in the *hadith* is about our hearts. It begins with the *du'a* to wash the heart with the water of snow and hail. In other narrations, rainwater is included. The Prophet ﷺ specified these waters because they are the purest, untouched and unpolluted by human hands, and are closest to the pristine nature that Allah created. These waters represent the purest cleansing, a restoration to the original state of *fitrah* that Allah loves. As for the cold of the snow and hail, coolness in Arabic suggests happiness of heart and eye while heat points to sadness and anger. Sins bring about the heat of Hellfire and the coolness of water extinguishes it. Sin, which is the fuel to the fire of temptation, creates a feverish desire in the heart and the cold water puts out the heat of desire. Sin also weakens the heart and the cold in this water solidifies it and brings strength to it. The Prophet ﷺ in another *hadith* would ask Allah to bring this coolness to his heart:

> كانَ رسولُ اللَّهِ صلَّى اللَّهُ عليَهِ وسلَّمَ يقولُ: «اللَّهُمَّ بَرِّدْ قَلبي بالثَّلجِ والبَرَدِ والماءِ البارِدِ اللَّهمَّ نَقِّ قَلبي مِنَ الخَطايا كما نَقَّيْتَ الثَّوبَ الأبيضَ منَ الدَّنَسِ»
>
> رواه الترمذي (٣٥٤٧) وقال حسن صحيح غريب وصححه الألباني (صحيح الترمذي ٣٥٤٧).
>
> «O Allah, cool my heart with snow, hail, and cold water. O Allah, cleanse my heart of sins as You cleanse the white garment of dirt.»
>
> Reported by al-Tirmidhi (3547) and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Tirmidhi*, 3547).

Asking Allah for heart-cleansing with different waters is asking for comprehensive and repeated purification until the heart reaches the ultimate state of purity.

The second part asks Allah to remove sins from the heart and purify it as the white garment is cleansed from dirt. Like with water, it signifies complete purification until no stain is left. When the heart is thoroughly cleansed, no doubt, temptation, or illness remains; it becomes a pure and rich heart. The white garment cleansing, like with the water, intimates the purity of the *fitrah* and restoring it after corruption and darkness. The white garment accepts stains with use and neglect. Paying attention to this garment and cleaning it constantly maintains its original state and prolongs its life. Similarly, when the heart's health is maintained, it stays close to its *fitrah* and is strong in the face of troubles and tests.

The third part of the *du'a* asks Allah to put distance between sin and us as there is between East and West. Here, we are asking Allah to protect us from the ill effects of our bad deeds in this life and the next by putting the greatest distance between them and us. We are also asking for the desire for these sins and their hold on us to leave us forever. East and West do not meet. When we are far away from our sins as East is from West, we will never meet them or fall under their spell again.

We may think of the three parts (water, white garment, and distance) as three stages in protecting ourselves from sin. Washing with water is for our past sins, the garment purification is for the current state of the heart, and the distance from sins is for the future.

Praying to Allah to wash away sins and mistakes with water of snow, hail, and rain is recommended for the deceased when we pray the *Janazah* (funeral) prayer:

> «اللهمَّ اغفرْ له وارحمْه واعفُ عنه وعافِه وأَكرِمْ نُزُلَه ووسِّعْ مُدخلَه واغسِلْه بماءٍ وثلجٍ وبرَدٍ ونَقِّه من الخطايا كما يُنقَّى الثوبُ الأبيضُ من الدَّنسِ وأَبدِلْه دارًا خيرًا من دارِه وأهلًا خيرًا من أهلِه وزوجًا خيرًا من زوجِه وقِه فتنةَ القبرِ وعذابَ النارِ»
>
> رواه مسلم (٩٦٣).
>
> «O Allah, forgive him; have mercy on him; pardon him; grant him noble provision; make his grave spacious, wash him with water, snow, and hail; purify him from sins as You have purified the white garment from dirt; grant him a better house in place of his present one, a better family in exchange of his present one, and a better spouse in place of his present one; and protect him from the trial of the grave and punishment of the Hell.»
>
> Reported by Muslim (963).

And it is recommended in the *Salah* before we read *al-Fatihah*:

> «اللهم باعِدْ بيني وبين خطاياي كما باعدتَ بين المشرقِ والمغربِ اللهمَّ نقِّني من خطاياي كما يُنقَّى الثوبُ الأبيضُ من الدَّنَسِ اللهمَّ اغسِلْني من خطاياي بالثَّلجِ والماءِ والبَرَدِ»
>
> رواه البخاري (٧٤٤) ومسلم (٥٩٨).

> «O Allah, put a distance between me and my sins as the distance You have put between East and West. O Allah, cleanse me of sin as a white garment is cleansed from filth. O Allah, wash away my sins with snow, water, and hail.»
>
> Reported by al-Bukhari (744) and Muslim (598).

The Prophet ﷺ got to physically experience this cleansing when he was young. He says about this experience:

> «كانت حاضنتي من بني سعدِ بنِ بكرٍ فانطلقتُ أنا وابنٌ لها في بُهمٍ لنا ولم نأخُذْ معنا زادًا فقلتُ (يا أخي اذهَبْ فأتِنا بزادٍ من عند أمِّنا) فانطلق أخي ومكثتُ عند البُهمِ فأقبل طائران أبيضان كأنَّهما نَسران فقال أحدُهما لصاحبِه (أهو هو؟) قال الآخرُ (نعم) فأقبلا يبتدراني فأخذاني فبطحاني للقفا فشقَّا بطني ثمَّ استخرجا قلبي فشقَّاه فأخرجا منه علَقتَيْن سوداوَيْن فقال أحدُهما لصاحبِه (ائتِني بماءِ ثلجٍ) فغسل به جوفي ثمَّ قال (ائتني بماءِ برَدٍ) فغسل به قلبي ثمَّ قال (ائتني بالسَّكينةِ فذَرَّه في قلبي) ثمَّ قال أحدُهم لصاحبِه (خُطْه) فخاطه وختم عليه بخاتمِ النُّبوَّةِ ثمَّ قال أحدُهم لصاحبِه (اجعَلْه في كِفَّةٍ واجعَلْ ألفًا من أمَّتِه في كِفَّةٍ) قال رسولُ اللهِ (فإذا أنا أنظُرُ إلى الألفِ فوقي أُشفِقُ أن يخِرَّ عليَّ بعضُهم) فقال (لو أنَّ أمَّتَه وُزِنت به لمال بهم) ثمَّ انطلقا فتركاني قال رسولُ اللهِ وفرَقت فرَقًا

شديدًا ثمَّ انطلقتُ إلى أمِّي فأخبرتُها بالَّذي لقيتُ فأشفقتُ أن يكونَ قد التبس بي فقالت (أُعيذُك باللهِ) فرحَّلتْ بعيرًا لها فجعلتني على الرَّحلِ وركِبتْ خلفي حتَّى بلغنا إلى أمِّي فقالت (أدَّيْتُ أمانتي وذِمَّتي) وحدَّثتُها بالَّذي لقيتُ فلم يرُعْها ذلك وقالت (إنِّي رأيتُ خرج منِّي نورٌ أضاءت منه قصورُ الشَّامِ)»

رواه أحمد (١٧٦٤٨) وحسن الهيثمي إسناده في مجمع الزوائد وحسنه الألباني (السلسلة الصحيحة ٣٧٣).

«My nursemaid was from the tribe of Sa'd ibn Abi Bakr. I went forth with a child of hers to herd animals of theirs, but we did not take any food with us. So, I said: "O my brother, go and bring us food from our mother." Therefore, my brother left and I stayed with the animals, and then two white birds like eagles came and one of them said to his companion: "Is it him?" He replied: "Yes." So, they came rushing to me and took hold of me and laid me on my back and opened my stomach and extracted my heart and opened it and removed two black clots from it. Then one of them said to his companion: "Bring me snow water." And he washed my insides with it. Then he said to his companion: "Bring me hail water." And he washed my heart with it. Then one of them said to his companion: "Sow him up." So, he did and sealed it with the Seal of Prophethood. Then one of them said to his companion: "Place him on one scale pan and one thousand of his Ummah on the other." The Messenger of Allah said: "And I was looking at the thousand above me afraid that they will fall on me." Then he said: "If his entire Ummah was on the other pan, he would be heavier than them." They then left and I was terrified, and I went and told my mother what happened

> and she feared that something could be wrong with me and said: “I seek Allah’s protection for you.” And she prepared a camel of hers and put me on it and rode behind me until we reached my [birth] mother and she said: “I have fulfilled my duty and delivered what you entrusted me with.” And she told her about what happened to me, but it didn’t worry her, and she said: “I saw that a light came out of me that lit the palaces of the Levant.”»
>
> Reported by Ahmad (17648) and al-Haythami and al-Albani declared it *hasan* (*al-Silsilah al-Sahihah*, 373).

What made Prophet Muhammad ﷺ so great was the purity of his heart and its devotion to his Creator. Loving him and following his Sunnah entails pursuing the type of heart he enjoyed, asked for, and recommended.

Laziness, sin, and debt

The last part of the *hadith* seeks Allah’s protection from sloth, sin, and debt. Laziness or sloth is favoring the comfort of the body over useful acts. It is when one can do something but fails to out of lack of desire and motivation. Laziness is very pernicious. It deprives us of the obedience of Allah despite having the ability to do it, slowly stealing away our time and life. Allah grants us the power, intelligence, and opportunity to act but we waste it all because we feel lazy. If Allah does not save us from it, one’s life could easily slip away from their hands. Then we would lose the opportunity to use our life for good, and we would lose the chance to make it to Heaven.

Laziness is the feature of the hypocrites in the Quran when they worship Allah. Shaytan wishes for our laziness and causes it with his whispers and acts. The Prophet ﷺ said:

«يعقد الشيطان على قافية رأس أحدكم إذا هو نام ثلاث عقد يضرب

كل عقدة (عليك ليل طويل فارقد) فإن استيقظ فذكر الله انحلت عقدة فإن توضأ انحلت عقدة فإن صلى انحلت عقدة فإصبح نشيطا طيب النفس وإلا أصبح خبيث النفس كسلان»

رواه البخاري (١١٤٢) ومسلم (٧٧٦)

> «Shaytan ties three knots at the back of your head when you sleep, and he seals each knot with "You have a long night ahead of you, so sleep." If he wakes up and remembers Allah, a knot is untied. If he performs *wudu*, a knot is untied. If he prays, a knot is untied and he would be energetic and in good spirit in the morning. Otherwise, he would be in bad spirits and lazy in the morning.»
>
> Reported by al-Bukhari (1142) and Muslim (776).

The treatment of laziness is through *iman*, since laziness in worship is the product of hypocrisy. Our proximity to the pious and the dedicated will challenge our indolence and raise the levels of our *iman*. We should pray to Allah—as in this *hadith*—to save us from this weakness. We can also take practical steps to help with this by avoiding procrastination and delaying important work, avoiding staying up at night and sleeping through the day or waking up late, and avoiding the tendency to over eat and stuff our bellies with food that make us sleepy and tired. It is also a good idea to develop a daily exercise regimen to keep us moving and chase away lethargy.

The last two impediments the Prophet ﷺ mentioned in the *hadith* are debt and sin. Sin here means the sinful act or the outcome of this act: the recorded sin. Either way, the *du'a* seeks Allah's protection from what angers Allah and what leads to it. Debt can also lead to sin as the Prophet ﷺ explained:

أن رسولَ اللهِ صلى الله عليه وسلم كان يكثر التعوذ من مِن المأثمِ

والمَغْرَم فقال له قائلٌ (ما أكثرَ ما تَسْتَعِيذُ يا رسولَ اللهِ مِن المَغْرَمِ!) قال «إن الرَّجُلَ إذا غَرِمَ حَدَّثَ فكَذَبَ ووَعَدَ فأَخْلَفَ»

رواه البخاري (٢٣٩٧) ومسلم (٥٨٩).

> The Messenger of Allah ﷺ often used to seek refuge with Allah from debt and sin. So, someone said: "O Messenger of Allah, how often you seek refuge from debt!" He said: «When one gets into debt, he lies when he speaks, and he breaks promises when he makes them.»
>
> Reported by al-Bukhari (2397) and Muslim (589).

The Prophet ﷺ often repeated this *du'a*, linking sin and debt. Being under the pressure of debts can lead to dishonesty and a host of other sins. Because of its possible harm, the burden of debt becomes something one wants to avoid as much as they can.

Project

Memorize the *du'a* in the *hadith*. If it is too long, memorize the part pertaining to the heart:

اللّٰهمَّ اغسَلْ قلبي بماءِ الثَّلجِ والبَرَدِ ونَقِّ قلبي منَ الخطايا كما نقَّيتَ الثَّوبَ الأبيضَ منَ الدَّنَسِ

Make it part of your regular *du'a*, joining it to the last *du'a* you have memorized from the last *hadith*. Repeat them every day for the next week, in each prostration of each *Salah*. Plan to make it part of your regular *du'a* henceforth.

HADITH TWENTY-THREE

الحديث الثالث والعشرون

Pray to protect your heart

عن شَكَلِ بن حُمَيْدٍ قال أتيتُ النَّبيَّ ﷺ فقُلتُ (يا رسولَ اللَّهِ عَلِّمْني تَعَوُّذًا أَتَعَوَّذُ بِهِ) قالَ فأخذَ بكَفِّي فقالَ «قُلْ اللَّهمَّ إنِّي أعوذُ بِكَ مِنْ شَرِّ سَمْعي ومِن شرِّ بَصَري ومِن شرِّ لِساني ومِن شرِّ قَلبي ومن شرِّ مَنِيِّي) يَعني فَرْجَهُ»

رواه أبو داود (١٥٥١) والترمذي (٣٤٩٢) وقال حسن غريب وحسنه ابن حجر والسيوطي وصححه الألباني (صحيح الترمذي ٣٤٩٢).

Shakal ibn Humayd said: I came to the Prophet ﷺ and said: “O Messenger of Allah, teach me a protective *du‘a* with which I can supplicate to seek refuge.” So, he held my hand and said: «Say: O Allah, I seek your refuge from the evil of my hearing, the evil of my sight, the evil of my tongue, the evil of my heart, and the evil of my private part.»

Reported by Abu Dawud (1551) and al-Tirmidhi (3492). Al-Tirmidhi, Ibn Hajar, and al-Suyuti declared it *hasan* whereas al-Albani declared it *sahih* (*Sahih al-Tirmidhi*, 3492).

Commentary

The successful purification of our hearts and souls rests on guidance and protection. Through guidance, we are given knowledge of the way and the will to tread it. And through protection, we are shielded from the harm we will face along the way. In this *hadith*, we learn to seek Allah’s protection from the evil of our senses, desires, and our hearts.

Seeking the protection of Allah

In the last *hadith*, we explored the importance of *du'a* and its effect on our relationship with Allah. An important part of our supplications to Allah is seeking His protection from harm and what we fear. This is an essential part of *du'a*, and in fact an essential part of being a human. As for it being an essential part of *du'a*, we read in the Quran and *hadith* many examples of seeking Allah's protection from sin, harm, Hellfire, evil and evildoers, Shaytan, and our bad qualities and habits. We all are trying to secure certain objectives in this life and the next (Heaven, success, family, and so on) and they cannot be attained unless certain obstacles are removed. Thus, *du'a* involves both asking Allah to remove all obstacles from our way and asking Him to help us secure our goals.

As for it being an essential part of being a human, it is quite natural for humans to fear many things around them, physical and otherwise. For this reason, we are in constant need to feel safe and are always looking for refuge to grant us this safety. We put our trust in many material constructions to thwart away harm, but our fears transcend the material. There is harm that is hard to detect or predict, and we have immaterial concerns that need spiritual answers. Though humans have devised many schemes (offerings, divination, amulets, talismans, etc.) to secure supernatural protection, Allah alone offers true protection and security. Asking Allah to protect us—and believing that He is the only one who can—fulfills this essential human need and grants us true peace where all else fails.

We humans have two basic enemies: Shaytan and ourselves. Shaytan is the external enemy that is bent on destroying us, and we need Allah to save us from his constant plots. Our self is our internal enemy: it loves this world and is strongly attached to its pleasures. This self has the roots of rebellion against Allah, is forgetful, and is too lazy to do what is good for it. This self ignorantly chooses the worst for itself and allows corruption into its life. If Allah were to leave us to our self, He would leave us to a foolish and transgressing self. We cannot reach Heaven with such nature, soul, and heart. This is why it is important to seek Allah's refuge from these qualities of the self.

Understanding our nature and our weaknesses helps us understand that there is no place for pride and arrogance in our lives. If we are good, it is only Allah who helped us be good, not our effort. If He did not aid and support us, we would be trapped as so many are in desire and sin. Every time we obey Allah, we witness in our devotion to Allah His care and support. When we admire our own religious knowledge and worship, we forget how great Allah's favor on us is and how little praise we deserve for our piety. Don't we know that we could lose it in a blink of an eye! Every time we seek Allah's protection, we remember how fragile our probity is and how misguided our self-admiration and pride are. We should consequently move to seek Allah's refuge from the ignorance that had bred such pride and arrogance.

The Messenger as a teacher

The Prophet ﷺ was both a Messenger and a teacher. He didn't only deliver a message but he taught it, and teaching is much more than delivery of information. As a teacher, he connected with his students, loved them, and showed them that he loved them. He transferred his love for the subject matter to them and created dedication and commitment in their souls. He made them love Allah so that they could continue to learn and teach Islam even after he was gone. He made them teachers.

In this *hadith*, we witness one of the many strategies that the Prophet ﷺ employed as a teacher. Shakal ibn Humayd came to the Prophet ﷺ expressing interest tinged with concern. You can sense this concern when he said: "Teach me a *du‘a* with which to protect myself." This was a man eager to learn but also worried. The Prophet ﷺ, sensing this and honoring his interest in learning, held his hand. This gesture shows love and brings comfort. It also keeps the listener's attention and emphasizes what he will hear next. When the verbal instruction is mixed with a physical gesture like this one, the listener will remember the advice for the longest time. Anyone interested in improving their teaching skills should study how the Prophet ﷺ related to and taught his Companions.

The ears

The body parts the Prophet ﷺ mentioned in this *hadith* are the portals to the heart. Our senses are how we understand the world around us and react to it. They are the parts that create and fuel our desires, and they are the parts that enjoy these desires. Seeking Allah's protection from their evil is to seek the purity of the heart by keeping the senses pure. Pay attention to your senses and you will be protected from much evil in this world.

In this *hadith*, and in the Quran, hearing is mentioned before sight. Ibn Ajibah explains in his *tafsir*, *al-Bahr al-Madid* (vol. 3, p. 152):

"Allah mentioned the blessing of hearing before sight in the entire Quran because it is more useful than sight to the heart, has more influence on the heart, and is more useful religiously."

He explains that people would be deprived of the full extent of religious knowledge and influence if they were all deaf but not so if they were blind. Others have noted that many past and present religious scholars happen to be blind but not deaf. This, they explain, shows that deafness is a greater impediment to acquiring religious knowledge than blindness. What is important for us to note is the great connection the heart has to what we listen to. As one of the portals that connects our heart to the outside world, our ears play the most important role in shaping our heart and selecting its destination. The way we use our ears, i.e. what we listen to, decides the health and liveliness of our heart.

Seeking refuge in Allah from the evil of our hearing is seeking His protection from hearing what Allah hates. It suggests, by implication, that the health of the heart is in listening to what Allah loves, hearing only the truth and what benefits you. The evil of our hearing has many examples. We can lend our ears to gossip and falsehood, which is especially harmful when the accused are religious scholars and leaders. Our ears also bring us great harm when we listen to pseudo-scholars who call to falsehood and confuse people about their religion. The harm of the ears includes listening to the advocates of the *haram* (forbidden), who beautify it in the eyes of the masses, who want our desires to reign supreme and who put down the obedience of Allah. It includes listening to what causes anger and envy and what generally creates more harm than good.

Seeking Allah's protection also means understanding the truth and being open to it when we hear it. For example, when one reminds us of a good we're missing or an evil we're doing, are we really listening to them? We may receive the truth but misunderstand it or understand it but do what Allah hates with it. We may hear the truth when we are not ready for it. Seeking Allah's protection means listening to what is good for us at the time. It also means spreading the good things we hear when there is benefit in it and burying the evil we hear so no one is harmed by it.

The eyes

Just like with our ears, our eyes are connected to our hearts and minds, and it is mainly through them that we relate to the world and those in it. Asking Allah to protect us from their evil means protecting them from what Allah hates. This includes all the *haram* that Allah prohibited, such as the unlawful lustful look. This look is one of the arrows in the quiver of Shaytan. Once one allows a forbidden image to settle in their heart, it will corrupt it. The heart will then be occupied with desires for this person. It is like poison that spreads from eye to heart and then to the rest of the body. What follows, unless Allah rescues us, is typically a greater or intense attachment to this person and the consequent realization of our desires through *haram* means.

One of the sins of the eye is the betraying look. This is what Allah refers to when He says:

يَعۡلَمُ خَآئِنَةَ ٱلۡأَعۡيُنِ وَمَا تُخۡفِي ٱلصُّدُورُ ١٩

He knows the deception of the eyes and what the chests conceal.
Ghafir (Q40:19)

Allah knows the bad intention behind our looks even when no other human can detect these intentions. This is the eyes' deception. Another of their deception is when one sneaks a forbidden look when others aren't watching and feigns piety when they are, or when one winks to signal that they are lying or moves their eye to mock someone or put them down. Part of this deception too is to pretend to have seen something when we haven't or to deny that we've seen it when we have.

Our eyes commit evil when we look with disdain at others or envy them. Reading *haram* material, especially false religious knowledge that corrupt our faith, brings great harm to our hearts and souls. When our eyes wander, curiously collecting every image that comes their way, they get distracted from focusing on the truth and loving it. Being engrossed in the glamor of the *dunya* distracts the heart and inflames its desires. So, instead of pondering the creation of Allah and His many signs and deducing the truth and majesty of Allah from them, the eyes become engrossed in their quest for this world and blind the heart to them. When the eyes are distracted, they don't seek the truth or recognize it when they see it. When they are overwhelmed by this world, they will no longer be attracted to virtue but be visually captivated by what Allah hates.

When Allah protects from the evil of our eyes, we ponder the creation of Allah and the truths He revealed. When Allah protects our eyes, we restrict our sight to what Allah loves and allows, and protect our heart from the invasion of Shaytan. The protected eyes are close to Allah, and so is the protected heart.

The tongue

Most of our sins come from our tongues, and we shall have more to say about the connection between tongue and heart later in this book (see *Hadith Thirty-Two*).

Since so many of our sins come from our tongues, protection from the evil of our tongues is a great protection from Hellfire. The evil of the tongue is to engage in what Allah hates, such as lying, gossip, spreading rumors, cursing, and vulgarity. It also includes ridiculing others, backbiting, divulging their secrets, and insulting them. Chief among the dangers of the tongues are statements of disbelief and polytheism, disobedience of Allah and His Prophet ﷺ, or demoralizing the believers as the hypocrites used to do. Hypocrisy, where one declares what is not in their heart, is also of the diseases of the tongue. Exaggerations can also be part of the sins of the tongue when we stretch reality and embellish it. In addition, there is failing to speak the truth when we are able, such as commanding the good and speaking out against evil, and being sucked into unnecessary arguments and discussions that hurt our *iman* and waste time. Spreading unreliable and unverified religious knowledge falls under the evil of the tongue, since this knowledge may turn out to be fabrications against Allah and His Prophet.

A tongue that is protected from its evil maintains its distance from *haram*. It doesn't harm people and doesn't anger Allah. It stays close to the book of Allah and *dhikr*, and speaks when there is benefit. It keeps quiet when there is no need, when there is no benefit, and when there's more harm in its articulations. This tongue knows that the angels are writing everything it says, so it restricts its movement to what brings it closer to Allah and avoids anything it even suspects may take it away from Him.

The heart

Our hearts can be houses of *iman* or the playgrounds of Shaytan. To be safe from the evil of the heart is to be safe from doubts and corrupt beliefs so our *iman* remains strong and unwavering. It also means that it is clean from desires that oppose Allah's, so its *shahawat* are in line with what Allah loves. This heart loves Allah more than anyone and anything else and cannot fathom a substitute. This heart doesn't fear anyone more than Allah and is completely dependent on Him. It has been saved from the traps of this world and had already packed its bags for its journey to the Hereafter. It remains in this world as a stranger, eager to please its Creator and no one else. It leaves its worldly worries to Allah, believing that He suffices it. As it lives by Allah, it lives for Allah.

This heart is free from diseases of shirk, hypocrisy, envy, jealousy, greed, and hatred. It stays close to Allah without boredom. Its setbacks are temporary because it keeps coming back to its Beloved and He accepts it every time. It had put its complete trust in Allah and surrendered to Him, and had made what Allah loves its own love and pursuit.

The private parts

Together with the tongues, our private parts are responsible for most of the sins of the children of Adam. They both move us to take uncalculated steps that throw us into sins and bring great harm to our life and *iman*. When we ask Allah to protect us from the evil of our private parts, we are asking Allah to protect us from fornication/adultery and any other illicit sexual act (we'll have more to say about fornication and adultery and their connection to the heart in *Hadith Thirty-Three* and *Hadith Thirty-Four*). We could also be seeking Allah's protection from the evil of our progeny. We are also asking Allah to keep us far from what leads to this sin in terms of illicit looks, sounds, touch, and encounters. By implication, we would be asking Allah to grant us *halal* alternatives to these forbidden acts. When *halal* is not available, we would be asking for the patience to stay away from the unlawful despite our attraction to it. We also need patience when *halal* is available but *haram* is pervasive and its temptation intense. In modern times, *haram* has become ubiquitous and easy, so staying away from it is a true challenge. This is why we need this *du'a* and why we should keep repeating it.

The desire for the opposite sex can be so intense that it could shake the faith of the very the pious and push them to clear acts of *haram*. In fact, Shaytan knows that we are our weakest in front of this *fitnah* and he uses it to take many humans to Hell. Remember this and ask Allah to protect you from a desire that can overwhelm you and ruin your life.

Project

First, memorize the *du'a* in this *hadith* and repeat it, as previously explained, throughout the week during the times when the *du'a* is likely to be accepted. Second, monitor your eyes, ears, tongues, and private parts for the next week. Make sure to keep them away from *haram*. To help with this goal, get your senses occupied with reading and listening to the Quran and other useful and virtuous acts and projects. Make a daily schedule for good deeds and stick to it. When you're busy with what pleases Allah, you won't have time to displease Him.

HADITH TWENTY-FOUR

الحديث الرابع والعشرون

A reverent heart and a satisfied soul

عن زَيْد بن أَرْقَم قال لا أَقولُ لَكُم إلا كما كان رسولُ اللهِ ﷺ يقول كانَ يَقولُ «اللهمَّ إني أَعوذُ بِكَ مِنَ العَجْزِ والكَسَلِ والجُبْنِ والبُخْلِ والهَرَمِ وعَذابِ القَبْرِ اللهُمَّ آتِ نَفْسي تَقْواها وزَكِّها أَنتَ خَيْرُ مَن زَكَّاها أنت وَلِيُّها ومَوْلاها اللهمَّ إني أعوذُ بك من عِلمٍ لا يَنْفَعُ ومن قلبٍ لا يَخْشَعُ ومن نَفْسٍ لا تَشْبَعُ ومن دَعْوَةٍ لا يُسْتجابُ لَها»

رواه مسلم (٢٧٢٢).

Zayd ibn Arqam said: I only say to you what the Prophet ﷺ used to say. He used to say: «O Allah, I seek refuge in You from inability, laziness, cowardice, miserliness, decrepitude, and the torment of the grave. O Allah, grant my soul its piety and purify it as You are the Best to purify it. You are its Supporter and its Master. O Allah, I seek refuge in You from non-beneficial knowledge, from an irreverent heart, from a dissatisfied soul, and from a *du'a* that goes unanswered.»

Reported by Muslim (2722).

Commentary

The *du'a* in this *hadith* seeks refuge from the basic impediments to our relationship with Allah and asks for the main qualities that support our righteousness. The *hadith* teaches that *iman* includes both a process of purification (*takhliyah*) from contaminants and acquisition and adornment (*tahliyah*) with noble character and behavior.

Inability and laziness

The Prophet ﷺ pairs inability (*'ajz*) and laziness (*kasal*) in this and other *hadiths* because of the connection between them. Both lead to inaction, though for different reasons, and seeking refuge from them is in fact seeking refuge from what inhibits our worship of Allah.

Inability to worship Allah happens because of lack of physical and/or financial abilities. It is to possess the desire and will to worship but finding oneself unable to. Allah says describing the reaction of some Companions to a state of *'ajz*:

وَلَا عَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ إِذَا مَآ أَتَوۡكَ لِتَحۡمِلَهُمۡ قُلۡتَ لَآ أَجِدُ
مَآ أَحۡمِلُكُمۡ عَلَيۡهِ تَوَلَّواْ وَّأَعۡيُنُهُمۡ تَفِيضُ مِنَ ٱلدَّمۡعِ
حَزَنًا أَلَّا يَجِدُواْ مَا يُنفِقُونَ ﴿٩٢﴾

Nor is there blame upon those who when they came to you so you might give them mounts, you said: "I can find nothing for you to ride upon," they turned back while their eyes overflowed with tears out of grief that they could not find something to spend.
Al-Tawbah (Q9:92)

These were sincere Companions who wanted to obey Allah and help the Muslims but had no money, and the Prophet ﷺ had nothing to offer them. Their inability to spend moved them to tears, unlike some of us today who are moved to tears when we have to give away money!

Laziness is the opposite of *'ajz* in the sense that the ability to worship is there but the desire is missing. With laziness, one has all they need in terms of health, wealth, and time but lacks the will, persistence, and motivation. It could be complete laziness that stops one from all or most worship or partial laziness that only allows the deficient performance of worship.

Laziness is a dangerous disease that drains our existence of value and squanders our life on this earth. Abdullah ibn Mas'ud رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُ said:

> قال عبد الله بن مسعود: (إني لأبغض الرجل أن أراه فارغاً ليس في شيء من عمل الدنيا ولا في عمل الآخرة)
>
> صفة الصفوة (ج١ ص١٥٦).
>
> I hate to see one idle, not engaged in matters of this world or the Hereafter.
>
> *Sifat al-Safwah* (vol. 1, p. 156).

The Companions would occupy their time with useful pursuit of this life or the next, and would not waste the hours of their day doing nothing. We should develop a plan to take full advantage of our days, and move from one project to the next in order to maximize the benefit of our time on this earth.

Cowardice and stinginess

Like the previous two, cowardice and stinginess are related: they too lead to inaction, each suppressing different aspects of our generosity, altruism, and sacrifice. Cowardice is the fear that prevents us from bodily/physical acts of virtue. Because of it, one holds back from defending others or speaking the truth out of what may happen. Cowardice can be very debilitating. This character flaw impedes many acts of obedience, suggesting to us that safety lies in dormancy, exaggerating the harm and cost of what Allah loves. The one who surrenders to timidity surrenders to their worst fears and the whispers of Shaytan. They do so because they lack trust in Allah's protection and supervision. The believer, on the other hand, surrenders their heart to Allah and knows that what is written will come to pass whether one did what Allah commands or if one stayed back in the safety of their home.

Allah says:

> يَقُولُونَ لَوْ كَانَ لَنَا مِنَ ٱلْأَمْرِ شَىْءٌ مَّا قُتِلْنَا هَٰهُنَا ۗ قُل لَّوْ كُنتُمْ
> فِى بُيُوتِكُمْ لَبَرَزَ ٱلَّذِينَ كُتِبَ عَلَيْهِمُ ٱلْقَتْلُ إِلَىٰ مَضَاجِعِهِمْ ۖ
>
> They say: "If we had a say in the matter, some of us would not have been killed right here." Say: "Even if you had been inside your houses, those decreed to be killed would have come out to their death beds."
>
> Al Imran (Q3:154)

What is written will come to pass whether we are brave or cowardly. Therefore, doing the right thing doesn't put us in danger, and hiding from the truth is not going to save us. If Allah is our Protector and He has all the power, fear should have no place in the heart of a Muslim.

The line between cowardice and prudence, however, can sometimes be blurry, and we need the guidance of revelation and the counsel of the wise to tell the two apart. Confusing the two leads to disastrous misadventures that mistake impatience for bravery. Our goal should not be to act no matter the consequences and results. We should take the best action that leads to the greatest benefits that Allah loves. Sometimes this means great patience and caution, and at other times it means speaking the truth despite threats. Wisdom is to choose the best course of action at the time.

If cowardice is lack of generosity with body and tongue, stinginess is the absence of generosity with wealth, counsel, time, and religious knowledge. Here, it is not fear of retaliation that holds us back but the fear that we will have less when we help. Stinginess is also fueled by our hatred to see others surpassing us, so we hold back any benefit from them. Like with cowardice, stinginess is built on mistrust of Allah and undue attachment to this world. Allah had promised us that what we possess grows when we spend for His sake, a promise that is not limited to wealth but extends to time, advice, knowledge, and talent.

The hatred we have for what others enjoy is an emotion that is built on intoxication with the world and lust for it. If one only cares for the Hereafter and the pleasure of Allah, they would disregard these inferior emotions and realize that:

1. The glamor and triumphs of this world are temporary and will end soon.
2. The gains of this world are a test.
3. The success of your fellow believer is not your failure; each have their unique path in a life that is different from ours.
4. Loving Allah means loving the best for the believers.
5. What Allah has in store for us is a lot better than what this world offers.

Decrepitude and the grave

The Prophet ﷺ sought Allah's protection from reaching a stage in old age where he would lose his mental and physical abilities, a challenging state for any individual and those around him. In such a state, one will be unable to care for himself and will need others to help him, and this help may not always be available, comfortable, or done in a caring manner. This state also deprives one from the ability to worship Allah as they used to. Therefore, the Prophet ﷺ asked Allah to preserve his mental and physical powers so he could continue to worship Allah as long as he was on this earth.

What follows old age is death and the deposit of our bodies in the grave. The transition to the other world could be a blessed one when we receive the rewards of our *iman* or a harsh one where we are punished for the wrong we did. Asking Allah to protect us from punishment therein is asking Allah to help us repent from sins that merit such punishment and to forgive us for our past transgressions. We should take the time to learn about the sins that lead to the Punishment of the Grave (e.g. slander, backbiting, failing to purify ourselves from the impurity of urine) and avoid them.

Taqwa and tazkiyah

After seeking Allah's protection from these hurdles, the *hadith* moves to asking Allah to grant the soul what it needs to move closer to Allah and to favor His guidance over any other. The first of these requests is asking Allah for *taqwa*: to avoid what angers Allah and to follow what He loves. The origin of *Taqwa* is to put a *wiqayah* (protection) between us and Allah's anger, and this is only possible when we do what Allah loves and refrain from what He hates.

The *hadith* also asks Allah to bestow *tazkiyah* upon the soul. When we proclaim in the *hadith* that Allah is the best provider of *tazkiyah* we are saying that He is the only One who can grant it because no one else can. We petition Him by noting that Allah is the Wali of the soul: its Protector, Champion, Guide, and the One closest to it. By noting His connections to our souls, we are pleading with Allah to take care of us because no one else can.

When the self is granted *tazkiyah*, it ceases to follow its desire or be dominated by worldly concerns. A soul with *tazkiyah* is happiest with Allah and His guidance. This *tazkiyah* removes the hardness of the heart and its illnesses, treating it with the medicine of revelation. Consequently, this heart blossoms in *iman* and *ihsan* and gets progressively attached to Allah. But we have to walk the path of *tazkiyah* for our requests to make sense. A meaningful *tazkiyah* is one where one acquires knowledge and follows it with action. Knowledge without action is not only fruitless but can be counterproductive, breeding arrogance and standing as evidence against us on the Day of Judgment. Yet while we walk the path of *tazkiyah*, we understand that unless Allah wishes, there can be no true change in our hearts. Our hearts are in His hand, and we ask Him to save us from our own selves.

Useless knowledge

There seems to be an almost limitless amount of knowledge and information in our world. In this *hadith*, the Prophet ﷺ is directing our attention to the fact that among this mass information, there is non-beneficial knowledge which we should avoid.

Non-beneficial knowledge is of different types and degrees. The first category of non-beneficial knowledge is one that harms our *iman* and *taqwa*. This is like learning magic, reading the books of disbelief and innovation, and those causing religious doubts. It includes learning how to harm others, steal, embezzle, forge documents, and fornicate. There is also no benefit in news of movies and their stars, the latest about singers and athletes, and gossip and rumors. The second category is knowledge that has no inherent merit to it and can distract from Allah such as the latest on fashion and cars. This knowledge strengthens our attachment to this world at the expense of our commitment to the next life. The third category is knowledge that has some merit but is overemphasized like political news and analysis that consume our time and discussions, and fixating on worldly knowledge at the expense of our relationship with Allah. The fourth category is beneficial knowledge that fails to bring us benefit. This happens when we don't apply it, like religious knowledge that changes nothing in our hearts and lives, and wisdom that doesn't affect our manners and character. Since the purpose of religious knowledge is application, receiving it without implementation is a liability. Ibn al-Sammak said:

قال ابن السَّمَّاك: (كَمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِذَا لَمْ يَنْفَعْ لَمْ يَضُرَّ لَكِنَّ العِلْمَ إِذَا لَمْ يَنْفَعْ ضَرَّ)

سير أعلام النبلاء (ج٨ ص٣٢٩).

There are so many things that if they don't benefit, they don't harm. But if religious knowledge doesn't benefit, it harms.

Siyar I'lam al-Nubala' (vol. 8, p. 329).

This is so because this knowledge is incriminating evidence that we knew the truth but chose to ignore it; we cannot claim ignorance. Amassing this knowledge is like the donkey that is carrying books. Allah says in the Quran:

مَثَلُ ٱلَّذِينَ حُمِّلُوا۟ ٱلتَّوْرَىٰةَ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَحْمِلُوهَا كَمَثَلِ ٱلْحِمَارِ
يَحْمِلُ أَسْفَارًۢا ۚ بِئْسَ مَثَلُ ٱلْقَوْمِ

> The example of those who were entrusted with the Torah but did not observe it is like that of a donkey who carries volumes of books.
> Al-Jumuah (Q62:5)

This animal carries books that don't benefit it, and those who don't follow what they know do the same. The difference is that a donkey cannot read and understand what it is carrying while humans can, making some humans more ignorant than animals.

We can add to the fourth category knowledge sought with bad intentions (e.g. for fame or wealth), since it doesn't benefit one in the next life even if they receive some worldly benefits through it.

The fifth category is beneficial knowledge that we are unable to comprehend because our level of knowledge and maturity doesn't allow us to digest it. Though it is true, this knowledge could be a source of *fitnah* for some. Abdullah ibn Mas'ud رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُ said:

قَالَ عَبْدَ اللهِ بْنَ مَسْعُودٍ: (مَا أَنْتَ بِمُحَدِّثٍ قَوْمًا حَدِيثًا لَا تَبْلُغُهُ عُقُولُهُمْ إِلَّا كَانَ لِبَعْضِهِمْ فِتْنَةً)

رواه مسلم في مقدمة صحيحه.

> You are not going to say to a people a thing that their minds cannot grasp except that it will be a *fitnah* for some of them.

Reported by Muslim in his introduction to *Sahih Muslim*.

Beneficial knowledge is what brings *khushu‘*. It moves us closer to Allah, increases our *iman*, and reminds us of the Hereafter. Any knowledge that does the opposite is non-beneficial or harmful knowledge. And the more harmful it is, the farther it keeps us from Allah.

Irreverent heart

Knowledge cannot benefit us if we don't receive it with an open heart. When the heart is closed, no amount of guidance it receives can change it. This heart doesn't comply with the truth and doesn't feel peace and tranquility when Allah is mentioned. It doesn't feel much when it hears the Quran. It doesn't soften when the Hereafter is remembered or when it sees the afflicted. Such a heart is either diseased or deceased.

One of the signs of having a hardened heart is what is called the dryness of the eye: it doesn't cry out of loving Allah or from fearing Him. The Prophet ﷺ said:

> «أَعوذُ بِكَ مِنْ عَينٍ لا تَدْمَعُ ونفْسٍ لا تَشْبَعُ وقَلبٍ لا يَخْشَعُ»
>
> صححه ابن حجر العسقلاني في فتح الباري (ج١١ ص١٣٩).
>
> «I seek Your refuge from an eye that doesn't cry, a dissatisfied self, and an irreverent heart.»
>
> Declared *sahih* by Ibn Hajar in *Fath al-Bari* (vol. 11, p. 139).

The Prophet ﷺ considered the dry eye something to worry about. It signals the callousness of the heart and its distance from Allah. A soft heart cries because it longs to be with Allah. It cries because it fears its past transgressions and is ashamed to face its Creator. It cries because it feels for the suffering of people around it. When the heart doesn't cry despite all of this, it means that it's occupied and worried about something other than its Creator. It had spent a long time away from Allah and grew hard because of it. The Companions رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ would decline some of the wealth of the world because it distracted their hearts.

> باع ابن عمر رحمه الله جملا فقيل (لو امسكته؟) فقال (لقد كان موافقا ولكنه اذهب شعبة من قلبي فكرهت ان اشغل قلبي بشيء)
>
> صفة الصفوة (ج١ ص٢٢٠).
>
> Ibn Umar once sold a camel. He was asked: "Why didn't you keep it?" He said: "It was an agreeable camel, but it attracted a branch of my heart, and I hate to occupy my heart with anything."
>
> *Sifat al-Safwah* (vol. 1, p. 220).

Abu al-Darda' used to say:

> كان أبو الدرداء يقول: (اللهم إني أعوذ بك من تفرقة القلب قيل ((وما تفرقة القلب؟)) قال (ان يوضع في كل واد مال)
>
> صفة الصفوة (ج١ ص٢٤٤).
>
> "O Allah, I seek Your refuge from the division of the heart." He was asked: "What is the division of the heart?" He said: "That one will have money in every valley."
>
> *Sifat al-Safwah* (vol. 1, p. 244).

The *khushu'* or reverence of the heart comes from its absorption of revelation from Allah and following its guidance. This creates love in it for Allah and fear of Him; it creates an overwhelming desire for the Hereafter and the pleasure of Allah. Love of this world competes with this goal and hinders it. Those who seek Allah must restrain some of their worldly desires for their hearts to stay alive.

Unsatisfied self

By its nature, our self is attracted to this world. It is insatiable. It craves this world to no end. Fueled with avarice, it proceeds to collect all that it can get its hands on, only to be bored shortly after with what it acquired. It then occupies itself with different pursuits in an endless cycle that stops only with death.

The sickness of the dissatisfied self lies in its attachment to this world. It tries to fill the hole inside with the finite world but finds the hole unfillable. So, it keeps going after food, clothes, wealth, property, fame, and so on. And no matter what it receives, it soon looks down on it and dismisses it as below par and inferior. There is always something else, or someone else who has more, or someone else who has done better. There is this constant fear that what it has will go away. It is in eternal torment because its pain cannot be healed, and its emptiness cannot be filled.

The satisfied self, on the other hand, has been purified from the world's domination. It received the beneficial knowledge of revelation with a reverent heart, and this transforms it. It erases its worldly avarice and plants the love of Allah and longing for the unimaginable bliss of Heaven. This self is happy with the little it receives from this world. The source of its satisfaction is its knowledge that it is Allah who granted it, and that whatever is in its hand from this world is destined to leave it. It also knows that more of this world spells fewer rewards in the Hereafter: having more is distracting. This self favors the sweetness of *iman* and the delayed reward of the Hereafter over the immediate glitter of the world.

The avarice of the self is praised in only one thing according to Prophet ﷺ:

«مَنْهُومانِ لا يَشْبَعانِ طالبُ علمٍ وطالبُ دنيا»

صححه الألباني (صحيح الجامع ٦٦٢٤) والوادعي على شرط الشيخين (الصحيح

المسند ٤٩).

> «There are two voracious people who will never be satisfied: a seeker of knowledge and a seeker of the *dunya*.»
>
> Declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Jami*‘, 6624) and al-Wadi‘i (*al-Sahih al-Musnad*, 49).

It is noteworthy that humans have this tendency to seek without limit, and this tendency can be directed towards good or evil. The one who seeks this world will never be satisfied with it, and he will be adding sins to his book of deeds. The seeker of knowledge will also never reach an end where he is satisfied, but his striving and intention add countless good deeds to his book.

Unanswered Du‘a

Allah is the only one whom we can turn to when in need. He is the only one who can help and is willing to help when others fail and abandon us. It is He who has all the power to bring change to our lives while others have none. So there is nothing more alarming to hear than the fact that our *du‘a* may not be accepted.

There is more than one reason why *du‘a* may be rejected. Asking for sin, aggression, or injustice is *haram* and thus rejected. There are also acts that prevent the answer of *du‘a*, like earning *haram* money, praying inattentively, impatience with delayed requests, and transgressing in our prayers (e.g. offering unnecessary rhyming).

We have no one else other than Allah to ask for help. If certain acts prevent the acceptance of our *du‘a*, we need to avoid them with all the strength we have.

Project

Memorize this *du‘a* and repeat it in the coming week.

Work on trying to soften your heart and bring tears to your eyes through reading/listening to the Quran, asking Allah for forgiveness often, and engaging in long *du'a* at night.

Try to be content with how much you have of this world. Whenever you see something of this world that makes you dissatisfied with your life, remember that this is not going to last. Focus your energy instead on pleasing Allah. See how this changes your perspective.

HADITH TWENTY-FIVE

الحديث الخامس والعشرون

Renew your iman

قال رسولُ اللهِ ﷺ: «إنَّ الإيمانَ ليَخْلَقُ في جَوْفِ أَحَدِكُم كَما يَخلَقُ الثَّوبُ فاسْأَلوا اللهَ أَنْ يُجَدِّدَ الإيمانَ في قُلوبِكُم»

رواه الحاكم (٥) والطبراني في المعجم الكبير (٨٤) وحسنه الهيثمي في مجمع الزوائد (١٥٩) والعراقي والألباني (السلسلة الصحيحة ١٥٨٥).

The Prophet ﷺ said: «Indeed *iman* gets worn out inside of you as a piece of clothing gets worn out. So ask Allah to renew *iman* in your hearts.»

Reported by al-Hakim (5), al-Tabarani (84), and al-Haythami in *Majma' al-Zawa'id* (159). Al-Iraqi and al-Albani declared it *hasan* (*al-Silsilah al-Sahihah*, 1585).

Commentary

Our *iman* is our most prized possession, the most valuable thing in life. Like all other possessions, it degenerates with time and neglect. If our desire is to meet Allah with strong *iman*, we have to be constant in its renewal and rejuvenation in our hearts.

Iman as a dress

The Prophet ﷺ compared *iman* to clothing. This link between the two can also be found in the Quran where Allah the Most Wise says:

يَٰبَنِيٓ ءَادَمَ قَدۡ أَنزَلۡنَا عَلَيۡكُمۡ لِبَاسٗا يُوَٰرِي سَوۡءَٰتِكُمۡ وَرِيشٗاۖ وَلِبَاسُ
ٱلتَّقۡوَىٰ ذَٰلِكَ خَيۡرٞۚ ذَٰلِكَ مِنۡ ءَايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ لَعَلَّهُمۡ يَذَّكَّرُونَ ٢٦

O children of Adam, We have given you clothing to conceal
you and as adornment. But the clothing of *taqwa* is better. That
is from the signs of Allah that perhaps they will remember.
Al-A'raf (Q7:26)

Allah reminds us in this *ayah* of His favor in granting us clothing that cover our nakedness and add beauty to our appearance. Allah then draws our attention to another type of dress that is better: *taqwa*, the clothing that lasts till the Day of Judgment. It conceals our spiritual shortcomings in this life and beautifies us before Allah and humanity. If physical clothing is essential for our bodies, the spiritual clothing of *taqwa* is indispensable for our souls and our fate in the next life.

Another *ayah* affirms this link between what we wear and our beliefs and deeds. It is the *ayah* where Allah says:

وَثِيَابَكَ فَطَهِّرۡ ٤

And purify your clothing.
Al-Muddathir (Q74:4)

Some of the Sahabah and their followers interpret this purification to mean purify your heart, intention, deeds, and soul (see *Tafsir al-Tabari* and *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*). The Arabs, the *tafsirs* explain, praise one for possessing clean clothes when they mean that he is pure and virtuous in character and behavior.

In one *hadith*, the Prophet ﷺ interpreted clothing in a dream as *iman* when he said:

«بينما أنا نائمٌ رأيتُ الناسَ يُعْرَضُونَ عَلَيَّ وعليهِم قُمُصٌ منها ما يَبْلُغُ الثَّدْيَ ومنها ما يَبْلُغُ دونَ ذلك ومَرَّ عَلَيَّ عمرُ بنُ الخطابِ وعليه قميصٌ

> يَجُرُّهُ قالوا ما أَوَّلْتَ يا رسولَ اللهِ قال الدِّينُ»
>
> رواه البخاري (٢٣) ومسلم (٢٣٩٠).
>
> «While I was sleeping, people were presented to me. They were wearing shirts, some of which reached their breasts and some reached lower than that. Umar was presented to me and he was dragging his shirt.» They asked: "How have you interpreted it, O Allah's Messenger?" He said: «Religion.»
>
> Reported by al-Bukhari (23) and Muslim (2390).

Since Umar رَضِيَٱللَّهُعَنْهُ possessed incredible *iman* and *taqwa*, the dream represented his *iman* as a long shirt that he was dragging. Those with weaker *iman* were wearing shorter shirts that left part of their bodies exposed. The covering and protection of *iman* in real life is likened to the covering of shirts in the dream.

The link between our insides and outsides can also be expressed in terms of clothing. According to Ibn Mas'ud رَضِيَٱللَّهُعَنْهُ:

> قال ابن مسعود رضي الله عنه: (أَسِرُّوا مَا شِئْتُمْ مَنْ أَسَرَّ سَرِيرَةَ خَيْرٍ أَلْبَسَهُ اللَّهُ رِدَاءَهَا وَمَنْ أَسَرَّ سَرِيرَةَ شَرٍّ أَلْبَسَهُ اللَّهُ رِدَاءَهَا)
>
> الآثار لأبي يوسف (ص١٩٦).
>
> Conceal whatever you wish inside. The one who conceals good, Allah will clothe him its clothing. And the one who conceals evil, Allah will clothe him its clothing.
>
> *Al-Athar* by Abu Yusuf (p. 196).

Ibn Mas'ud announced that whatever we hide in our hearts must and will be externalized. There is no possible sustained way to hide who we are on the inside. He expressed this eventual externalization in terms of clothes that Allah puts on us, an honest reflection of who we truly are. The one who desires a beautiful exterior must remember that it is a product of their inner beauty. Pretense is ephemeral.

Iman gets old

Do you feel exhausted? Fatigued? Burned out? Many of us have this feeling in life as we move between its many demands. We are physically tired, mentally drained, and—most importantly—spiritually dry. It feels like we've ran out of fuel and cannot keep running anymore. We keep going on, drudgingly, because we have little or no choice. We keep going on because this is what everybody else does. At times, it seems we are one to two steps away from giving up completely. Why does this happen?

The Prophet ﷺ lets us know in this *hadith* that our *iman* weakens with time. We have been introduced to this reality in past *hadiths* (see *Hadith Five*). The Prophet ﷺ likened the process of decline of *iman* to the decay of clothing. The visual example approximates what happens to our *iman*. By observing and remembering how clothes wear out, we understand the immaterial and invisible decay of our *iman*. Comprehending the physical aspect strengthens our understanding of the immaterial one.

Let's try to understand the impact that the decline of *iman* has on us. Allah explained in *Surah al-A‘raf* (26) the benefits of the blessing of clothing: concealment and beautification. When a dress is worn-out, it doesn't cover the body parts that we want covered. Secondly, it leaves the body exposed to heat and cold, without protection. Thirdly, it loses its ability to adorn us. When *iman* is worn-out (weak), it suffers from similar shortcomings:

1. Like clothes failing to cover our nakedness, a weak *iman* fails to cure and conceal our flaws, diseases, and weaknesses.
2. Like the failure of worn-out clothes to protect, a weak *iman* doesn't protect us from Shaytan, our impulses and desires, the

fitnah of this life, and Hellfire.

3. And like decayed clothes, a weak *iman* fails to add beauty to our souls and lives.

Let's now try to understand how weak *iman* makes us feel. Worn-out clothes don't bring happiness but sadness. They also cause embarrassment, anger, and envy. (Please note that I'm marking common feelings, not encouraging anyone to feel this way because their clothes are old. The Prophets and their Companions wore old and modest clothes.) When our *iman* is weak, we experience a myriad of negative emotions, reflecting the fact that, like old clothes, our *iman* stopped making us happy. It is unable to respond to pressure and doesn't have the capacity to supply answers.

But why does this happen? Again, the clothes analogy is enlightening. Why do clothes get worn-out? They do so because, first, we fail to protect them from harm such as tears, fading from the sun, and so on. Second, we don't maintain their upkeep and so their quality declines with continued use. Both are signs of neglect or diminished interest in their possession. And with neglect, decline is to be expected. Our *iman* gets worn-out, or weak, because of the same reasons: we either fail to protect it or fail to maintain it.

1. Failure to protect our *iman* is to leave it victim to all the sins that assault it and weaken it. Every sin is a cut to the thread of *iman*, a stain on it that blemishes its beauty and purity. If we keep allowing these stains to gather, they will cover up the splendor and joy of this priceless fabric.
2. When we ignore our *iman* and *Taqwa*, we fail to sustain and strengthen them. Just like a fabric that is not cared for, they become old and weak with the passage of time and the tests of this life.

The combination of the two leaves our *iman* tattered and frayed.

And when it is in this state, it does little to ameliorate our sadness, anxiety, and pain. Such *iman* is in desperate need of help.

Iman becomes anew

The Prophet ﷺ teaches us in this *hadith* that *iman* can be rejuvenated; life can be breathed back into it.

ٱعۡلَمُوٓاْ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُحۡيِ ٱلۡأَرۡضَ بَعۡدَ مَوۡتِهَاۚ قَدۡ بَيَّنَّا
لَكُمُ ٱلۡأٓيَٰتِ لَعَلَّكُمۡ تَعۡقِلُونَ ١٧

Know that Allah brings life to the land after its death. We have
clarified the signs to you so perhaps you can comprehend.
Al-Hadid (Q57:17)

Allah mentions this *ayah* after explaining in the previous one (*al-Hadid*: 16) that some hearts become hard because of their distance from Allah. Lest one imagines that there is no way back, Allah explains that just as He revives the physical land after it had dried up and lost its vegetation, Allah can revive the hearts with the rain of *iman*. No one should ever despair and believe that their hearts are beyond repair or that they can never come back from their mistakes.

Iman, like what we wear, can become anew. New clothes make us happy and excited. They give us energy, confidence, and satisfaction. Because of them we may feel better about ourselves and the world around us, and thus are likely to be more affable. They move us to be more generous as we donate our older clothes. Since *iman* is the clothing of the soul and heart, the joy and gratification it brings is unparalleled. Can coming closer to a new dress be compared to coming closer to Allah? Can the joy that a worldly clothing brings match the happiness we receive when we know and love Allah?

Some of us may be cynical when we hear this. *Iman* to some has become something nice to hear about but impractical and unfulfilling:

it stopped bringing the same joy and satisfaction it used to. Why do we feel this way? To understand why, go back to a time your *iman* made you happy and excited. When was that? This most likely was when we were young and carefree, when we decided to accept Islam or commit ourselves to it for the first time. *Iman* then was new and exciting. We were full of energy, idealistic, and had so many wonderful plans for the future. We may have been naive a little, but our *iman* and sincerity were true and genuine. Then we faced the challenges and disappointments of this life and our *iman* got dented. Each problem added a new dent, each setback made it seem more quixotic. Then a part of us simply gave up. We learned to live with weak *iman* and turned our back on the romanticism of our past. We adapted to life without true joy and convinced ourselves that this is normal.

When we surrendered to weakness of *iman*, we did so because our setbacks made us forget the sweetness of faith. We forgot the peace we enjoyed when our *iman* was strong and became disillusioned with *iman*, cynical about its possibilities.

Our *iman* caved under pressures because we didn't strengthen it. We didn't push back. And when we stopped pushing, we got used to a lackluster existence. This is like someone who tried to lose weight through diet and exercise yet failed to see results because of inconsistency. He then became disenchanted and hopeless of achieving his goal. Such cynicism is a product of inconsistency, not the failure of the methods themselves. It is not *iman* that had failed us, but we failed to hold on to it.

If you miss the excitement and peace that your faith brought, hold on again to your *iman* and never let go of it. Immerse yourself into it and believe with all your heart. Surrender to Allah and let Him bestow upon you the peace and joy of *iman* again. *Iman* will always provide us with happiness as long as we seek this happiness from it. But when we stop, it will also stop. Doesn't this make sense?

As you grow *iman* in your heart, your regrets will go away one by one. The anger and anxiety will be lifted immediately or gradually, all in accordance with our reliance upon Allah and love for Him. *Iman* will not only make our existence tolerable but meaningful. Our spiritual lethargy and disappointments will disappear when we give *iman* the chance to change our hearts. Whenever you renew your *iman*, you will regain the excitement and energy you had when your *iman* was fresh and strong. Surrender yourself completely to Allah for you to see these full blessings.

Renew your iman

When we restart the engines of *iman*, we will see great results by the Will of Allah. The diseases of our hearts will receive the treatment they need. Our character will improve, and its flaws will be covered with our good deeds. We will have stronger defenses against the *fitnah*s of this life and the plots of Shaytan. Most importantly, it will bring us closer to Allah and fill our hearts with contentment. But how do we renew our *iman*?

1. As the *hadith* suggests, we should ask Allah to renew faith in our hearts.

   اللهم جدد الإيمان في قلوبنا

   This should become part of our regular *du'a*, a regular concern that we are address every time we are speaking to Allah the Most Merciful.

2. We should take some time out from our busy schedules and lives and devote it to our hearts and the Hereafter. We will use this time to ponder our lives, see what's missing from them, and try to get on the right track to the forgiveness and pleasure of Allah. We will consider in these times the wrong we do and stop it, the right

we do and maintain it, and what's lacking and fix it. This time of reflection and *muhasabah* (taking account of our good and bad deeds) is essential for the health of our *iman* and its continuity. Abu al-Darda' رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُ said:

قال أَبو الدَّرْدَاءِ رضي الله عنه: (إِنَّ مِنْ فِقْهِ الْعَبْدِ أَنْ يَتَعَاهَدَ إِيمَانَهُ وَمَا نَقَصَ مِنْهُ وَمِنْ فِقْهِ الْعَبْدِ أَنْ يَعْلَمَ أَمُزْدَادٌ هُوَ أَمْ مُنْتَقِصٌ وَإِنَّ مِنْ فِقْهِ الرَّجُلِ أَنْ يَعْلَمَ نَزَغَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ أَنَّى تَأْتِيهِ)

شرح أصول اعتقاد أهل السنة والجماعة (ج٥ ص١٠١٦).

It is from one's depth of understanding to take care of his *iman* and what decreases of it. And it is from one's depth of understanding to know whether he has gained or has lost [in terms of *iman* and good deeds]. And it is from one's depth of understanding to know from where the whispers of Shaytan come to him.

Sharh Usul I'tiqad Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah (vol. 5, p. 1016).

This depth of understanding is built on the frequent checking and fortification of our *iman*. If one doesn't inspect their *iman*, they won't sense its decline. And if they don't sense its decline, they won't do anything to fix it.

3. One of the things that help in cultivating *iman* in our hearts is keeping the company of the righteous, worshiping Allah with them and around them. Muadh رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُ said:

قالَ مُعاذ: (اجلِسْ بنا نؤمنْ ساعة)

رواه ابن أبي شيبة وصححه الألباني (مختصر صحيح البخاري ج١ ص١٩).

Sit for an hour so that we increase our *iman*.

Reported by Ibn Abi Shaybah and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Mukhtasar Sahih al-Bukhari*, vol. 1, p. 19).

Muadh is one of the most learned Companions of the Prophet ﷺ, and here he is seeking the company of the righteous to increase his *iman*. We glean from this how the Companions took advantage of opportunities to increase their *iman* whenever they could find them. In that sitting, the Companions would talk about Allah's blessings, praise Him, study the Quran, and learn *hadith*. These periods touch the heart and elevate the *iman*. These moments belong to Heaven.

4. Constancy in worship, done with comprehension and sincerity, removes the rust of time and maintains the sheen of *iman*. Regular reading and study of the Quran, regular dhikr of Allah that comes from the heart, regular prayers—all this keeps us close to Allah and under His guidance and protection.
5. The harm of slippage and setbacks can be erased immediately with repentance, asking Allah for forgiveness, and the performance of compensatory good deeds. If we keep these sins in our lives, they will gnaw at our *iman*, bit by bit, and leave it hallow and spiritless. If your *iman* is weak, take sin out of your life. You will feel a lot better when you do.
6. And keep asking Allah to support you in your struggle until you win. And you have not won until you have reached Him in Paradise.

Iman is best renewed through the Quran and Sunnah, through the example of the Prophet ﷺ and his Companions. Allah, who wants *iman* from us, is the best to teach us how to attain it. *Iman* is not following every fad and fluff because it is new and exciting, because it is light and doesn't demand much from us. True and lasting *iman* can only be understood and maintained through what Allah sanctioned and the model the Prophets of Allah provided. Read the biographies and wise sayings of the Companions and the early predecessors and you will gain a true understanding of what is serious *iman* and what is mere pretense and amusement.

Project

1. Take time to look at what you wear and reflect on how this is a great blessing from Allah. Consider how it conceals our nakedness and what we want to hide. Consider how it adorns our appearance. Reflect on how it protects from summer heat and the cold of winter.
2. Imagine if Allah were to clothe you in this life a clothing that represents your *iman*. Would you be happy with it? Would you go out with it?
3. Grab an old article of clothing that you are no longer using and think about why you stopped using it. Consider that this could be your *iman* if Allah doesn't protect you and you don't take care of it. Would you like your *iman* to look like this? To be as cheap as this? To be the cheapest thing you have?

   قَالَ أَبُو حَازِمٍ: (قَدْ رَضِيتُ مِنْ أَحَدِكُمْ أَنْ يُبْقِيَ عَلَى دِينِهِ كَمَا يُبْقِي عَلَى نَعْلَيْهِ)

   حلية الأولياء (ج٣ ص٢٣٩).

   Abu Hazim said: "I will happy with one of you if you care for your *iman* as you care for your shoes."

   Hilyat al-Awliya' (vol. 3, p. 239).

4. Memorize and repeat the *du'a* where you ask Allah to renew your *iman*. Make it part of your regular *du'a*.

HADITH TWENTY-SIX

الحديث السادس والعشرون

Change your body and heart

كانَ رسولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ يدعو بِهَذا الدُّعاءِ: «رَبِّ أَعِنِّي ولا تُعِنْ عَليَّ وانْصُرْني ولا تَنْصُرْ عَليَّ وامْكُرْ لي ولا تَمْكُرْ عليَّ واهْدِني ويَسِّرِ الهُدَى لِي وانصُرْني على من بَغَى عليَّ رَبِّ اجْعَلْني لَكَ شَكَّارًا لَكَ ذَكَّارًا لَكَ رَهَّابًا مِطواعًا إليكَ مُخْبِتًا لَكَ أَوَّاهًا مُنيبًا ربِّ تَقَبَّل تَوْبَتِي واغْسِلْ حَوْبَتي وثَبِّتْ حُجَّتي واهْدِ قَلْبي وسَدِّدْ لِساني واسْلُلْ سَخِيمَةَ قَلْبي»

رواه النسائي في السنن الكبرى (١٠٥٥٢ طبعة دار التأصيل) والترمذي (٣٥٥١) وأبو داود (١٥١٠) وحسنه ابن حجر وصححه ابن القيم وأحمد شاكر والألباني (صحيح الترمذي ٣٥٥١).

The Prophet ﷺ used to make this *du'a*: «My Rabb, aid me and do not aid against me, grant me victory and do not grant victory over me, plot for me and do not plot against me, guide me and facilitate guidance for me, and grant me victory over those who transgress against me. My Rabb, make me to You ever-grateful, of You ever-remembering, to You ever-fearful and ever-obedient, to You ever-humble, to You oft-regretful and returning. My Rabb, accept my repentance, wash my sin away, confirm my proof, guide my heart, straighten my tongue, and remove the blackness of my heart.»

Reported by al-Nasa'i in *al-Sunan al-Kubra* (10552) and al-Tirmidhi (3551) and Abu Dawud (1510). Ibn Hajar declared it *hasan*, whereas Ibn al-Qayyim, Ahmad Shakir, and al-Albani declared it *sahih* (*Sahih al-Tirmidhi*, 3551).

Commentary

The *tazkiyah* of the heart is not simply an internal process that is disconnected from the rest of our existence and personality but is a holistic transformation. In this *hadith*, we see how praying for the health of the heart is embedded into a complete metamorphosis which the *hadith* is seeking. We also see in the *hadith* that the health of the heart rests upon both a process of purification and another of acquisition.

Help me and don't help against me

The *hadith* starts by asking Allah for help in religious and worldly matters: the first sentence (aid me and do not aid against me) is for help in religious matters while the second (grant me victory and do not grant victory over me) is for matters pertaining to the world.

Praying to Allah for help in our obedience and worship reminds us of the other incident where:

> أنَّ رسولَ اللهِ صلَّى اللهُ عليهِ وسلَّمَ أخذ بيده وقال «يا معاذُ واللهِ إني لَأُحبُّك واللهِ إني لَأُحبُّك» فقال «أوصيك يا معاذُ لا تَدَعَنَّ في دُبُرِ كلِّ صلاةٍ تقول (اللهمَّ أعِنِّي على ذكرِك وشكرِك وحسنِ عبادتِك)»
>
> رواه أبو داود (١٥٢٢) وصححه الألباني (صحيح أبي داود ١٥٢٢).
>
> The Prophet ﷺ held the hand of Muadh and said: «O Muadh, by Allah I love you, by Allah I love you. I advise you not to leave at the conclusion of every *salah* that you say: "O Allah help me to remember you, to thank you, and to worship you well."»
>
> Reported by Abu Dawud (1522) and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih Abi Dawud*, 1522).

Believers know that they have many obstacles on their journey of faith, and they won't be able to reach Allah unless He helps them. We are fighting against Shaytan, those who are under his spell, our own weaknesses, and the many temptations of life. And because of that, we ask Allah to give us power over all of these enemies and obstacles and not give them power over us. The real need for this supplication is evident in how the Prophet ﷺ advised Muadh to repeat it at the conclusion of every *salah* and not to neglect it. We need this divine assistance every second of every day.

In the second sentence (grant me victory and do not grant victory over me), we ask Allah to be on our side against those who desire us harm. We are asking Allah to withdraw His support from them and to grant it to us, so they cannot abuse us. Allah had promised victory in the Quran to those who are on His side when He said:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓا۟ إِن تَنصُرُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ يَنصُرْكُمْ وَيُثَبِّتْ أَقْدَامَكُمْ ٧

O you who have believed, if you support Allah, He will support
you and plant firmly your feet.
Muhammad (Q47:7)

He also said:

إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُدَٰفِعُ عَنِ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓا۟ ۗ

Indeed, Allah defends those who believe.
Al-Hajj (Q22:38)

Allah supports and champions the believers against all that they worry about in proportion to their *iman* and *tawakkul*. The more that they believe in Allah and surrender to Him, the more that He supports and protects them. The more that they honor Allah's commands and guidance and put them first in their lives, the more that Allah will honor them and save them from every ordeal. So, when we are asking Allah to champion us, we are also in essence asking Allah to make us worthy of this protection by observing what He loves and abstaining from what

He hates.

The first two sentences in this *du'a* teach us something important about the limit of our power and intelligence. Allah says:

إِن يَنصُرْكُمُ ٱللَّهُ فَلَا غَالِبَ لَكُمْ ۖ وَإِن يَخْذُلْكُمْ فَمَن ذَا ٱلَّذِى
يَنصُرُكُم مِّنۢ بَعْدِهِۦ ۗ وَعَلَى ٱللَّهِ فَلْيَتَوَكَّلِ ٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَ ١٦٠

If Allah helps you, none can overcome you. And if He forsakes
you, who is there after Him that can help you? And in Allah
Alone let believers put their trust.
Al-Imran (Q3:160)

And Allah says:

أَمَّنْ هَٰذَا ٱلَّذِى هُوَ جُندٌ لَّكُمْ يَنصُرُكُم مِّن دُونِ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنِ ۚ
إِنِ ٱلْكَٰفِرُونَ إِلَّا فِى غُرُورٍ ٢٠

Who besides the Most Merciful can be an army to you to help
you? The disbelievers are in nothing but delusion.
Al-Mulk (Q67:20)

The believer constantly feels that they are in need of Allah. No matter how much power, smarts, ability, and skill they possess, it is Allah who has the power to save and protect. And no matter how much piety we may think we have, we shouldn't let pride into our souls. Rather than focusing on our greatness or achievements, we should remember that it all happened because of Him. And it cannot happen without Him. If He leaves us alone, we will surely see that our greatness was but a mirage.

Asking Allah to plot for us and not against us is one of the clearest examples of our weakness in this world. A plot is a plan hatched in secret to trap others at their weakest. How can we protect ourselves from such plots if we are unaware of them? How can we defend ourselves against an enemy that doesn't seem like an enemy or against a harm that masquerades as a favor? We need the Mercy of Allah to keep us safe from such stealthy opponents. We need to repeat this *du'a* so that Allah will be our protector even when we cannot protect ourselves.

Yet more than human plots, it is the plot of Allah that we have to worry about the most. This is when Allah deservedly brings harm to someone wherefrom they didn't expect. Allah does this to some as a consequence of their own plots and rebellion against Him. Allah says:

وَإِذْ يَمْكُرُ بِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ لِيُثْبِتُوكَ أَوْ يَقْتُلُوكَ أَوْ يُخْرِجُوكَ ۚ
وَيَمْكُرُونَ وَيَمْكُرُ ٱللَّهُ ۖ وَٱللَّهُ خَيْرُ ٱلْمَـٰكِرِينَ ٣٠

> And remember when the disbelievers plotted against you to imprison you, kill you, or expel you. And they were plotting and Allah was planning, and Allah is the Best of the planners.
>
> Al-Anfal (Q8:30)

These were plots to oppose and silence the truth, and yet Allah extracted His Prophet from their midst without any harm and turned each of their plots against them. What they thought was bringing them benefit turned to be their own downfall, as Allah says:

قَدْ مَكَرَ ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ فَأَتَى ٱللَّهُ بُنْيَـٰنَهُم مِّنَ
ٱلْقَوَاعِدِ فَخَرَّ عَلَيْهِمُ ٱلسَّقْفُ مِن فَوْقِهِمْ وَأَتَىٰهُمُ
ٱلْعَذَابُ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ ٢٦

> Those before them indeed plotted, but Allah struck at the foundation of their building, and then the roof fell down upon them, from above them, and the torment overtook them from directions they did not perceive.
>
> Al-Nahl (Q16:26)

This is a parable for those who plot against Allah and the believers. When Allah attacks their building (i.e. anything they do) from its foundation, He completely destroys it. And when the roof collapses, it is what they built with their own hands that destroys them. And so, does their punishment come to them from where they could not expect. For anyone who hatches a scheme to hurt others, this *ayah* is a warning that should steal sleep away from their eyes.

But someone may exclaim that this is all about the disbelievers, so why should the believers worry about the plot of Allah? Listen to what Allah says:

أَفَأَمِنُوا۟ مَكْرَ ٱللَّهِ ۚ فَلَا يَأْمَنُ مَكْرَ ٱللَّهِ
إِلَّا ٱلْقَوْمُ ٱلْخَـٰسِرُونَ ﴿٩٩﴾

Then did they feel secure from the plan of Allah? But no one
feels secure from the plan of Allah except the losing people.
Al-A‘raf (Q7:99)

To feel secure from the plots of Allah is to feel secure from Allah's punishment, to be content with our piety. And no one should ever feel that. We all have sins, some of which we are not even aware. One of the *du‘a* of the Prophet ﷺ was:

«اللَّهمَّ اغفِرْ لي خطيئتي وجهلي وإسرافي في أمري وما أنت أعلمُ به منِّي.»

رواه البخاري (٦٣٩٩).

> «O Allah, forgive my sin, what I did out of ignorance, my transgression in my affairs, and what You know better than I do.»
>
> Reported by al-Bukhari (6399).

We worship Allah but our worship is marred with laziness, neglect, showing off, and other shortcomings that diminish it. Consequently, a Muslim worships Allah aware of their own faults, fearful that he may not have been sincere. He is also keenly aware of his many sins. He, therefore, feels that he deserves the punishment of Allah, and it could come to him in forms that he doesn't recognize. The believer doesn't stop worrying about his sins until he meets Allah and enters Jannah. Meanwhile, he tries to keep himself safe from the plots of Allah with repentance and avoidance of sins. And in addition to all that, supplicating to Allah for His protection.

The next sentence in the *du'a* asks Allah to guide us and facilitate guidance for us. Guidance is the ability to distinguish good from evil and the ease to act on this knowledge. The first part of the sentence (guide us) asks Allah to rescue us from ignorance and confusion: to let us know the truth and for it not to be obscure or difficult to understand, and for us to know our own faults and shortcomings and not be deluded about our own piety. The second part (facilitate guidance for us) asks for the desire, power, and circumstances that aid in following this guidance. One may know the truth very well but find it a burden. One may know the truth very well but be attracted to a different path, a path that speaks to his desires and weaknesses. Asking Allah to make guidance easy for us is asking for the removal of all obstacles that stand in our way and deprive us of happiness with the truth.

The *hadith* then returns to praying to Allah to grant us victory against those who have wronged us. There is a connection between this sentence and the one that precedes it. To ask Allah to facilitate guidance is to ask Him to make following His Will easy for us. And when one is wronged and thus full of rage, justice is not the first thing on our minds but the desire for revenge. To ask Allah for His help in returning our rights is to remember that it must happen within the limits of Islam. In other words, we shouldn't allow the bitterness we feel and the scars of injustice to blind us to the requirements of *taqwa* and justice, both of which Allah loves.

Living under injustice is damaging both morally and physically, and so we turn to Allah to grant us power against those who have wronged us. We ask Him to remove their injustice and overturn it, so we don't suffer because of it. It is also important for their injustice to stop so we can start to heal and forgive. And we ask Allah to end their aggression because it is part of the corruption that He hates on this earth

Obedient to you

The second section of the *du'a* uses a string of hyperbolic adjectives to ask that noble character become part of who we are. And it puts Allah, the object of this devotion, first (e.g. to You ever-thankful) to indicate that this be exclusive for Him. We are asking that we embrace all this for His sake, because we love Him and fear Him. We are asking for this intimate connection to be established and preserved, for it to be strong so that we are constantly aware of Allah and desirous to be near Him.

We begin with asking Allah for thankfulness at all times, for small and big gifts, for the constant blessings that we enjoy but may forget. This is particularly important when we know that, as Allah states:

وَقَلِيلٌ مِّنْ عِبَادِيَ ٱلشَّكُورُ ﴿١٣﴾

But few of My slaves are grateful.
Saba' (Q34:13)

It is the attitude of many humans to be ungrateful, not to notice and appreciate all that Allah had given them. Abu al-Darda' رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُ said:

(ما بِتُّ ليلة فأصبحت لم يرمني الناس فيها بداهية إلا رأيت أن علي من الله تعالى فيه نعمة)

حياة السلف بين القول والعمل (ص٨٢٥).

> I didn't sleep a night and wake up without someone causing me a calamity except that I saw this as a blessing from Allah.
>
> *Hayat al-Salaf bayna al-Qawl wa al-'Amal* (p. 825)

Safety from harm is a great blessing to be thanked. But even the harm we receive deserves to be thanked if we look at it in the right way.

> كان يقال: (إذا اشتكى الرجلُ ثم عُوفِي ولم يُحْدِث خيرًا ولم يَكُفّ عن سُوءِ لقيتِ الملائكةُ بعضُها بعضًا وقالت إن فلانًا داويناه فلم ينفَعْه الدواء)
>
> حياة السلف بين القول والعمل (ص٨٢٧).
>
> It used to be said: "If a man is sick and then gets well but doesn't perform new good deeds or stop an evil he is doing, the angels meet each other and say: 'Indeed, we medicated so and so but the medicine didn't benefit him.'"
>
> *Hayat al-Salaf bayna al-Qawl wa al-ʻAmal* (p. 825).

Blindness to the many blessings of Allah invariably leads to ingratitude, which takes form in worshiping other than Allah. It is also manifested in failing to thank Allah but thanking others and feeling indebted to them. Since ingratitude deprives us from seeing all the good that Allah has given us, it leads to bouts of depression and dissatisfaction with our lives. Thankfulness is the ability to see the word with more clarity.

One of the greatest things that will help us be more thankful is to remember Allah all the time, the quality that follows our request for thankfulness in the *hadith*. When you remember Allah often, your eyes will open to all the blessings that He gives you. You will not be trapped by Shaytan who limits your gaze to what is seemingly wrong in your life. The remembrance of Allah breaks the chains of Shaytan and saturates our souls with peace, contentment, and happiness.

أَلَا بِذِكۡرِ ٱللَّهِ تَطۡمَئِنُّ ٱلۡقُلُوبُ ٢٨

Indeed, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest.
Al-Raʻd (Q13:28)

Remembering Allah is the food for the soul without which it cannot live.

The *hadith* then balances our relationship with Allah by asking that we also become ever-fearful of Him. Fearing Allah is to fear the magnitude of our sins, that they are far too numerous and big, that our repentance lacks sincerity. Fearing Allah is to know that we have violated the rules of the Most Powerful, and that His punishment is unlike any other. Fearing Allah is to feel the shame of sin, that we are carrying with us an embarrassment about which Allah will ask about. To fear Allah is to honor Him and His Majesty. It is the genuine fear of Allah that keeps people out of Hell.

Fear and love of Allah lead to the request of becoming very obedient of Allah, and for our soul, tongue, and body to find it easy and desirable to worship Allah. It is to find oneself with compliant limbs and soul; whenever it is time to worship Allah, he rushes to it. When he learns something new or is reminded of what he forgot, he applies it. This same person finds his limbs and soul stiff when it comes to the disobedience of Allah. He has conditioned his body to practice the truth, and thus his body finds it unnatural to disobey Allah.

This person is humble before his Creator. He doesn't oppose Allah and His guidance but submits to it. Asking for this humility removes any opposition and arrogance from our heart, knowing that we are nothing without the Most Merciful. This type of person frequently returns to Allah from any wayward path or practice. This could be a path of sin or forgetfulness where we neglect to be as close to Allah as possible. Whatever it is, this person frequently comes back to Allah to ask for forgiveness, strength, and guidance. He comes back to Allah with all his needs, confusions, and troubles. This person is *awwah*, which a remorseful sound made when one recognizes the mistake he has done. Allah describes His beloved Ibrahim عَلَيْهِ ٱلسَّلَامُ with these two qualities when he said:

إِنَّ إِبۡرَٰهِيمَ لَحَلِيمٌ أَوَّٰهٞ مُّنِيبٞ ﴿٧٥﴾

Indeed, Abraham was forbearing, *awwah*,
and frequently returning to Allah.
Hud (Q11:75)

The two qualities are connected. To be *awwah* is to return to Allah for forgiveness and comfort. To be *awwah* is to make *du'a* and *dhikr* when you realize the wrong that you have done, to cry for your mistakes, and to rush back to the security of *iman* and revelation. It is there, very close to Allah, that one finds the security and meaning we all seek.

Guide my heart

The last part of the *hadith* prays to Allah to accept our repentance. Since Allah loves and accepts all repentance, the *du'a* is asking for ours to be sincere and sound. One can repent from sin for worldly reasons or the repentance may lack one or more elements that make it sincere. Repentance must include regret, the resolve not to return to the misdeed again, the compensation of those we may have wronged, it must be for the sake of Allah, and must happen before the moment of death arrives. We cannot be fully certain that we have complied with all of these conditions, so we continue to ask Allah to accept our repentance despite our many inadequacies. This is followed—appropriately—with *du'a* for Allah to wash away all traces of sin.

Asking Allah next to confirm our proof is to ask Him to confirm our *iman* and strengthen its proofs so we're saved from doubt. It means strengthening our utterances and making them honest and sound. It also means strengthening our replies to the questions of the grave and during any *fitnah*, so we do not fall victim to misguidance after being guided. The *du'a* then moves to ask Allah to straighten our tongues. When the tongue is straight, it only speaks the truth and refrains from anything else.

Praying for the heart's guidance is praying for it to know Allah and to learn what brings it closer to Him. This includes understanding the wisdom of the Shariʿah that removes all doubt and confirms *iman* in the hearts. It includes knowing more about Allah until we love Him and fear Him more than anyone else. It includes knowing ourselves better, so we are free from hubris and cruelty. Since the health of the heart is not only built on the ingestion of the beneficial but also the removal of harm and disease, the *duʿa* is concluded with the request to extract the blackness of our heart. This blackness is the disease of the heart and its hatred. This is the darkness and pain we feel inside whenever we err or are distant from Allah. Extracting this heavy block leaves the heart light to absorb the truth and fly to the Hereafter.

HADITH TWENTY-SEVEN

الحديث السابع والعشرون

Remove your sorrows and worry

قالَ رسولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ: «ما أَصابَ أَحَدًا قَطُّ هَمٌّ ولا حَزَنٌ فقال (اللَّهُمَّ إنِّي عَبْدُكَ وابْنُ عَبدِكَ وابنُ أَمَتِكَ ناصِيَتي بِيَدِكَ ماضٍ فِيَّ حُكْمُكَ عَدْلٌ فيَّ قَضاؤُكَ أَسْأَلُكَ بِكُلِّ اسْمٍ هو لكَ سَمَّيْتَ به نفسَكَ أو أَنْزَلْتَهُ في كِتابِكَ أو عَلَّمْتَهُ أَحَدًا من خَلْقِكَ أو اسْتَأْثَرْتَ بهِ في عِلمِ الغَيْبِ عِندكَ أنْ تَجعلَ القرآنَ رَبيعَ قَلبي ونورَ صَدْري وجَلاءَ حُزْني وذَهابَ هَمِّي) إلَّا أَذْهَبَ اللهُ عزَّ وجلَّ هَمَّهُ وأَبْدَلَهُ مَكانَ حُزْنِهِ فَرَحًا» قالوا (يا رسولَ اللهِ ينبغي لنا أن نتعلَّمَ هؤلاءِ الكلماتِ؟) قال: «أَجَلْ يَنْبَغي لِمَنْ سَمِعَهُنَّ أَنْ يَتَعَلَّمَهُنَّ»

رواه أحمد (٣٧١٢) والحاكم (١٨٧٧) وابن حبان (٩٧٢) وصححه ابن القيم وأحمد شاكر والألباني (السلسلة الصحيحة ١٩٩).

The Prophet ﷺ said: «There is no one who is afflicted with distress or grief and says: "O Allah, I am Your slave, son of Your slave, son of Your female slave; my forehead is in Your hand, Your command over me passes and Your decree over me is just. I ask You by every name belonging to You with which You have named Yourself—whether You revealed in Your Book, taught to any of Your creation, or have preserved in the knowledge of the Unseen with You—that You make the Quran the spring of my heart, the light of my breast, a departure for my sorrow, and a release from my anxiety, " but Allah will take away his distress and grief and replace it with joy.» He was asked: "O Messenger of Allah, should we learn these words?" He said: «Of course; everyone who hears them should learn them.»

Reported by Ahmad (3712), al-Hakim, and Ibn Hibban. Ibn al-Qayyim, Ahmad Shakir, and al-Albani declared *sahih* (*Al-Silsilah al-Sahihah,* 199).

Commentary

The Prophet ﷺ offers in this *hadith* the cure to two of the most common and corrosive ailments of the heart: sorrow and worry. The *hadith* demonstrates that *tawhid* and the Quran, our connections with Allah, are the greatest cures to whatever is burdening our hearts. The importance of this *hadith* is evident in the emphasis of the Prophet ﷺ put on learning and understanding it.

Grief and distress

Our heart is the main target of Shaytan, and he tries to destroy it with his greatest weapons: *hamm* (distress over the future) and *hazan* (sorrow over the past). One only needs to see how widespread these feelings are and how debilitating they can be to understand their potency as weapons. All of us, with no exception, feel the pain of these emotions and many are saddled by their weight. They prevent us from doing many good deeds and sap us of energy and good will. With time, they begin to undermine our *iman* and trust in Allah. They can transform us from pious and happy people into sad and anxious individuals who have lost their faith in Allah. They can become so chronic that they steal all purpose and joy from our lives, and we find ourselves helpless before them.

How can we liberate ourselves from them? Is there a way out? The good news is that there is a cure, and it is possible to stop feeling miserable every day. The Prophet ﷺ guides us in this *hadith* to the cure, a confirmation that Islam came to lead people to the happiness of this life and the next. Allah reveals what guides people out of darkness into the light, out of adversity into relief, out of sadness into happiness. The revealed religion rescues us from our mental anguish and pain and teaches us how to repel the attacks of Shaytan. Allah indeed reveals the best of medicine.

People seek different medications for these two illnesses of the heart. We go out, we travel, we go shopping, and we meet up with friends and family to chase the specter of disturbing thoughts. We watch movies, we listen to music, and we follow sports and fashion—all distractions to take our mind away from our troubles. But there are two main problems with these solutions. The first is that they are temporary; the pain will soon return. This is why many of us throw ourselves in cycles of distraction, jumping from one distraction to the other and not affording to allow ourselves any break because of the pain. The second problem is that some of these options are *haram*, and *haram* treatment only inflicts more pain and weakness; it fosters dependence on and addiction to this option. The more we do it, the worse we feel; it compounds the problem. And because we feel worse, we take even more of it, just like a drug, and we get buried in cycles of pain and addiction.

We are moved, for example, towards continuous consumption because the joy the last purchase brought had faded. We become addicted to entertainment and its news, sports and its scores, and fashion and its latest iterations. The reason that we cannot pull out is the all emptiness that these leave behind and the assault of our buried and untreated thoughts.

The treatment from Allah is different. It goes to the root of the problem and doesn't shy away from it. It doesn't increase our pain but removes it. We don't feel lousy after it but better. And the more we seek it, the better we will feel. And with time, we will conquer many of these negative feelings and ways of thinking and find comfort in being close to Allah.

Surrender to Allah

The *du'a* begins with a declaration that we, our parents, and all of our ancestors are slaves of Allah. We are saying that we are utterly poor before You, in complete need of You, and I and my forefathers have always been like that. Our created nature is one of complete dependence on You, and there is no escaping it. The one who truly wants to boast about himself and his accomplishments will claim that he comes from a line of people with the same virtues and high rank. And the greatest humility is to claim that you and your whole ancestry are indebted to someone and in need of him. When we say that we and our parents are His slaves, we are affirming our complete and absolute need, because no one that we know or come from was ever able to do without You in their lives. And like them, I cannot do without You in my life.

The second part of the *du'a* goes on to affirm all this by stating that our forehead is in Allah's hand. What Allah decides to happen will surely do because no one can oppose Him; at the same time, His judgment is just. This reminds us of what Allah says in the Quran:

إِنِّي تَوَكَّلۡتُ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ رَبِّي وَرَبِّكُمۚ مَّا مِن دَآبَّةٍ إِلَّا هُوَ ءَاخِذُۢ
بِنَاصِيَتِهَآۚ إِنَّ رَبِّي عَلَىٰ صِرَٰطٖ مُّسۡتَقِيمٖ

Indeed, I have relied upon Allah, my Rabb and your Rabb.
There is no creature but that He is in control of its *nasiya*
[forehead]. Indeed, my Lord is on a straight path.
Hud (Q11:56)

The *nasiya* is the forelock, the hair that grows at the front of the head, and it is used to refer to the location of the hair: the forehead. When one controls an animal's forehead, they have complete control over it. And when we say that Allah has our forehead in His hand, we are saying that He does whatever He wills with us. We have no power and He has it all. And when he decides something, it happens whether we want it or not. We know from observing our lives and the lives of others how limited our control is over the world and what happens in our lives. Good or bad, many things happen despite our will and sometimes to our complete shock. This all testifies to the power that Allah has over His creation. The things we decide to do don't always happen. But when Allah decides, it surely comes true.

This instills in us complete reliance on Allah. The one who knows that Allah has power over all people stops fearing them or relying on them. He knows that he doesn't really need them. He knows that they cannot harm him unless Allah allows it. His heart fills with trust of Allah, and the fear he had of humanity evaporates. This is why Hud عَلَيۡهِ ٱلسَّلَامُ said in the Quran:

> قَالَ إِنِّيٓ أُشۡهِدُ ٱللَّهَ وَٱشۡهَدُوٓاْ أَنِّي بَرِيٓءٞ مِّمَّا تُشۡرِكُونَ ٥٤
> مِن دُونِهِۦۖ فَكِيدُونِي جَمِيعٗا ثُمَّ لَا تُنظِرُونِ ٥٥
> إِنِّي تَوَكَّلۡتُ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ رَبِّي وَرَبِّكُمۚ
>
> He said: "I call Allah to witness and bear you witness that
> I am free from what you associate other than Him. So plot
> against me all together and do not give me respite. Indeed, I
> have relied upon Allah, my Rabb and your Rabb."
> Hud (Q11:54–55)

Hud عَلَيۡهِ ٱلسَّلَامُ trusted Allah to such an extent that he challenged all of his people to try to plot against him and destroy him. His certainty in Allah left no space for fear of people since Allah was on his side.

With Allah's complete power comes His complete justice. As the *ayah* states: (Indeed my Rabb is on a straight path.) The Arabs use this imagery to indicate that one is just, noble, and praiseworthy; and in the *ayah*, it means that Allah's actions are all praiseworthy. The *ayah*, just like the *hadith*, complements the absolute power of Allah with mention of His absolute justice. Humans tend to lose sight of justice the more power they have, but Allah has perfect forms of both.

In the *hadith*, the supplicant acknowledges that no matter what happens to them, Allah only decrees justice. Allah is Just with all. He doesn't burden us with what we cannot bear, and rewards us abundantly for the good that we do. All of us have no trouble receiving the gifts of Allah and don't question His Justice when He grants us more than we deserve. But the minute things don't go our way, we start to question Him and lose our trust in Him. Did we forget that Allah is Just? Did we forget that Allah sends these things for a reason? The harm that we receive in this life is not the result of Allah being unkind to us but is caused by sins that we've put forth on this earth. Rather than blame Allah for the trouble in our lives, why not investigate the role we play in creating our own pain? Ali رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُ is reported to have said:

(لَا يَرْجُو عَبْدٌ إِلَّا رَبَّهُ وَلَا يَخَافَنَّ إِلَّا ذنبه)

المجالسة وجواهر العلم (ج٢ ص١٨٧).

> Let one not hope but from their Rabb and not fear but their sin.
>
> *Al-Mujalasah wa Jawahir al-'Ilm* (vol. 2, p. 187).

When we understand that the problems in our lives are the product of our sins, we will realize that Allah was not unjust to us. When we understand that these problems are indeed good for us, our assessment of our entire life will change. Allah sends these afflictions to purify us and remind us. They raise our rank in Jannah and bring us closer to Allah. When we think of them as such, they stop causing us pain, and we finally understand why they happened.

The beginning of this *du'a* carries in it the seeds of the cure. When one knows that they are completely and utterly a slave of Allah, they will empty their hearts of anyone other than Him. They will move according to Allah's will and be happy with Him because He is their

Rabb. His decisions will be their joy because they are His decisions, knowing that what Allah chooses is always the best option. They see Allah's Justice and Mercy in everything happening around them. When they hate something, they don't turn against their Creator and blame Him but try to eradicate the reasons behind the calamities: their sins. Their fear of the future turns to comfort because they know that they are in the hands of the Most Merciful. Their sadness about the past diminishes as they understand that it was something that had to happen, that it wasn't unfair, and that they are, or can be, better Muslims because of it.

Allah's beautiful names

The *hadith* teaches the supplicant how to approach Allah. We approach kings and dignitaries on this earth by what they love; we made offerings to royalty in the past to let us in their courts, hear our pleas, and grant us our wishes. But how should we approach Allah, the King of kings? How do we start talking to Him? What does He love and what does He hate? This is all hidden from us unless Allah teaches us. One of the best ways to approach Allah is through His names.

The wonderful thing about this *hadith* is that we are asking Allah through all of His names. We ask Him by every name He had named Himself, whether this name was known to humanity or kept only with Him. What is amazing is that despite the myriad of Allah's names that we know, there are a lot more that we don't know. And this give us a glimpse of the incredible Majesty of Allah, that He is far beyond our full comprehension and knowledge. No matter how much we know about Allah, there is a lot more that we don't know. Just consider that while everything else in this universe received its name from another, Allah was the One who named Himself! *Allahu akbar*! This is beyond anything that we can imagine. And the Muslim can only stand in awe of this and surrender themselves to the Majesty of Allah and His Wisdom. Do our hearts allows us after all this to question Allah or suspect any of His decrees?

The spring and light of my heart

This part of the *du'a* is the one that the introduction was leading to: our request. It is the request for Allah to grant us serenity and make the Quran the spring of our hearts and the light of our chests.

Spring in the *hadith* references the season but it could also be translated as rain of the heart. Spring is the season that brings most joy and comfort with its greenery and pleasant weather. It is the time when the earth comes back to life and the plants regrow to fill the land with beautiful colors, sweet smells, and delicious fruits. We are asking in this *du'a* for beauty, joy, and comfort to take over our hearts through the Quran. We are asking that the Quran be the joy of our hearts, for us to internalize its beauty, and for it to be the balm that rescues our hearts like the rain rescues the parched land. We are asking Allah for the Quran to overwhelm our hearts with its wisdom every time we read or listen to it, for our hearts to receive the Quran the way the earth receives rain water, and for our hearts to live in the spiritual spring season of the Quran.

Light and water are common metaphors for the guidance of Allah in the Quran and Sunnah. In *Surah al-Baqarah* (17-20), Allah explains the rebellion of the hypocrites against His guidance using the imagery of light and water. And in this *hadith*, the Quran is presented as the spiritual water and light of the heart. Light removes all confusion, brings about certainty, and helps the *iman* of the heart grow like it does to plants. Light brings feelings of comfort and peace, just as darkness brings the opposite feelings of unease and fear. When our heart believes in the Quran and treats it as its nourishment and life, there will be no disease that the Quran will leave untreated.

The last part of the *du'a* is reserved for removing our sadness and worry through the Quran. We need this *du'a*, especially when our worries accumulate. In another narration of the *hadith*, the Prophet ﷺ advises the one with plenty of worries to repeat the same *du'a*:

> «مَنْ كَثُرَ هَمُّه فليَقُل...»
>
> صححه الألباني (التوسل ٣١).
>
> «Let the one who suffers from many worries say...»
>
> Declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*al-Tawassul*, 31).

The promise that the Prophet ﷺ made was that no matter what your worries are, Allah will send you inner relief and replace your sadness with happiness. Anyone burdened with the gloom of sadness and anxiety can surely find the blessing and comfort of this *du'a* if they (1) say it with sincerity and full dependence on Allah, (2) understand and remember the wisdoms of the *du'a*, and (3) believe that the Quran is truly the cure to whatever ails them.

Asking Allah for this cure means that we cannot afford to be distant from the Quran. How can the Quran cure us of our pain if we don't read it? If we don't understand it? Malik ibn Dinar said:

> قال مَالِك بن دينار: (يَا حَمَلَةَ الْقُرْآنِ مَاذَا زَرْعَ الْقُرْآنُ فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ فَإِنَّ الْقُرْآنَ رَبِيعُ الْمُؤْمِنِ كَمَا أَنَّ الْغَيْثَ رَبِيعُ الْأَرْضِ فَإِنَّ اللهَ يُنَزِّلُ الْغَيْثَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ فَيُصِيبُ الْحُشَّ فَتَكُونُ فِيهِ الْحَبَّةُ فَلَا يَمْنَعُهَا نَتْنُ مَوْضِعَهَا أَنْ تَهْتَزَّ وَتَخْضَرَّ وَتحسُن فَيَا حَمَلَةَ الْقُرْآنِ مَاذَا زَرْعَ الْقُرْآنُ فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ أَيْنَ أَصْحَابُ سُورَةٍ أَيْنَ أَصْحَابُ سُورَتَيْنِ مَاذَا عَمِلْتُمْ فِيهِمَا)
>
> حلية الأولياء (ج٢ ص٣٥٨).
>
> O People of the Quran, what did the Quran plant in your hearts? For indeed, the Quran is the spring of the heart like the rain is the spring of the land. Allah sends the rain from the sky

> to the earth, it falls on a latrine with a seed in it, and the rotten space the seed's in doesn't stop it from growing, greening, and becoming beautiful. O People of the Quran, what did the Quran grow in your hearts? Where are the people of *surah* so and so? Where are the people of *surah* so and so and *surah* so and so? What did you do with them?
>
> *Hilyat al-Awliya'* (vol. 2, p. 358).

This supplication, and our sorrow and worry, is a reminder that we need to return to the Quran and open our hearts to it. Closed hearts will continue to suffer and languish in their misery. Shaytan never stops with his attacks. This life never stops disappointing us. But the hearts that are attached to Allah will weather all of these assaults and triumph. The hearts that are close to Allah will experience some of the happiness of Heaven before they even enter it.

Project

The Prophet ﷺ advised us to learn this *du'a* and repeat it. Try it this week.

Let us reintroduce the Quran into our lives. Let us allow it to cure our hearts and take our burdens away. Designate a special time each day for reading a set portion of the Quran, and keep to it for the next week. Resolve to make the Quran a fixture in your life from now on, and ask Allah to help you do so.

HADITH TWENTY-EIGHT

الحديث الثامن والعشرون

Polish your heart repeatedly

قالَ رسولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ: (إِنَّ العَبْدَ إذا أَخْطَأَ خَطيئَةً نُكِتَتْ في قَلْبِهِ نُكْتَةٌ سَوْداءُ فإذا هُوَ نَزَعَ واسْتَغْفَرَ وتابَ سُقِلَ قلبهُ وإن عادَ زِيدَ فيها حتَّى َتعْلُوَ قَلْبَهُ وهو الرَّانُ الذي ذَكَرَ اللهُ ﴿كَلّا بَلْ رَانَ عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ مَا كَانُواْ يَكْسِبُونَ﴾ [سورة المطففين: ١٤])

رواه أحمد (٧٩٥٢) والترمذي (٣٣٣٤) وقال حسن صحيح و حسنه الألباني (صحيح الترمذي ٣٣٣٤).

The Prophet ﷺ said: «When one commits a sin, a black spot appears on his heart. When he refrains from it, seeks forgiveness, and repents, his heart is polished clean. But if he returns to it, it increases until it covers his heart, and this is the *Ran* which Allah mentioned: ﴾No, but on their hearts is the *Ran* which they earned﴿ [*al-Mutaffifin*: 14].»

Reported by Ahmad (7952) and al-Tirmidhi (3334) who said it is *hasan sahih*, and al-Albani declared it *hasan* (*Sahih al-Tirmidhi*, 3334).

Commentary

We all have setbacks in our lives. Our journey to Allah will have its own setbacks as well. The *hadith* teaches that we always have the power, with Allah's help, to transcend our mistakes and erase them from our hearts. If we don't, they will grow to destroy our hearts and lives.

The black dot and Ran

The Prophet ﷺ teaches us in this *hadith* that sins have an effect on our hearts (see *Hadith Three*). Each sin deposits a black dot into the heart, the size of each is in proportion to the severity of the sin. To understand the damaging effects of sins, consider what happened to the Black Stone in this *hadith*. The Prophet ﷺ said:

> «نزلَ الحجرُ الأسوَدُ منَ الجنَّةِ وَهوَ أشدُّ بياضًا منَ اللَّبنِ فسَوَّدَتهُ خطايا بَني آدمَ.»
>
> رواه الترمذي (٨٧٧) وصححه الألباني (صحيح الترمذي ٨٧٧).
>
> The Black Stone came down from Heaven and was whiter than milk but the sins of the children of Adam blackened it.
>
> Reported by al-Tirmidhi (877) and al-Albani declared it *sahih* (*Sahih al-Tirmidhi*, 877).

If this is what sins can do to a stone, imagine what they do to a living and beating heart! Interestingly, sins have an effect on the environment around us. Sins even harm non-living objects, depriving the world of its beauty and blessings. The absence of peace, rise of conflict and crime, lack of blessings in our harvests and societies, all these are our sins speaking back to us and announcing our moral failures.

Like the lost beauty and purity of the Black Stone, we lose our beauty, purity, and shine with each sin. Each sin is a black dot on a white cloth, a spot of rust on a shiny surface. Sin doesn't only bring Hell in the next life but a hellish existence on this earth as well. Sin steals away joy from our life. It imprisons us in our anxieties and fears, in our dissatisfactions and anger, and steals us away from Allah. How can we find comfort and beauty away from Allah, the source of all comfort and beauty? Sin blocks us from seeing the truth and loving it; it makes us more inclined towards corruption, Shaytan, and our desires. With each sin, we lose more of our sincerity and *iman*, even our potential for *iman* and understanding of the truth diminishes. The black marks on the heart are invisible but their effect on our lives is unmissable. When life seems dark, even though there is no major problem in your life, you should trace this feeling back to these dots. When the reminders of the Quran and *hadith* fail to move you, you should link this to the *iman* in your heart. When you find your comfort and happiness in what Allah hates and not in what He loves, you should attribute this to the weakness of your heart. Sins even leave their mark on the faces of the impious, covering them with gloom and stealing their beauty and light.

When enough of these sins pile up, they completely block our path to Allah. This is the *Ran* that the *hadith* and the Quran speak about. *Ran* is a covering, a layer, a membrane that surrounds the heart. It is like rust on a smooth and shiny surface. The more of it, the more that it conceals and distorts. Allah says:

إِذَا تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِ ءَايَٰتُنَا قَالَ أَسَٰطِيرُ ٱلْأَوَّلِينَ ﴿١٣﴾ كَلَّا ۖ بَلْ ۜ رَانَ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِم
مَّا كَانُوا۟ يَكْسِبُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

> When Our *ayahs* are recited to him he says: "Tales of the ancients." No, but what they earned has covered their hearts.
> Al-Mutaffifin (Q83:13–14)

Allah explains in these *ayahs* that their rejection of the truth happened because of the sins that overwhelmed their hearts. These sins stood between them and Allah and prevented them from loving and following His guidance. Their constant rejection of the truth and disobedience contributed to their own misguidance. Though these *ayahs* are describing the disbelievers, Muslims have to worry about the possibility of their sins eventually leading to a similar fate. In the state of *Ran*, sin becomes a habit, the heart gets so used to it that it not only fails to reject it but misses it when it's absent. If we experience similar emotions, we have to realize that some sins have left deep marks on our hearts.

There is a nice metaphor to help us visualize the reaction of the heart to each sin and the outcome. The heart is like a hand, and each sin is like the folding of one finger. When enough fingers fold, the hand is completely closed. Make a fist and see how your hand is unwilling to receive anything in this form, like the heart unwilling to accept guidance or advice. The hand is least functional when assuming this shape: cannot grasp, cannot write, cannot greet, etc. It is also most aggressive and destructive in this form. If you want to regain the full use of your hand, you have to start unfolding these fingers. Our sins have to go away for the heart to reopen.

The covered heart

When the heart is covered, it recognizes little or no truth. And if it recognizes it, it doesn't love it enough to follow it. The darkness of this heart deprives it of mercy and justice, and fills it with cruelty and hatred. This heart destroys and corrupts, and cannot heal or love. It doesn't long for the Hereafter but only for this world, drowning in its pleasures, obsessed with it. Every worldly loss, even if small, is a tragedy in its eye but religious loss is not worth a second look. It learns a lesson from every worldly loss but is oblivious to the demise of its *iman*. This heart languishes in misery but is too distracted to notice its misfortune. But when the distractions are over, it will see the clear truth.

After reaching the state of *Ran*, the heart can be sealed (*khatm* or *tab*‘). Like a sealed door or letter, a sealed heart doesn't open easily, the consequence of further degeneration in disbelief. The stage that follows the seal is putting a lock on the heart (*qafl*) so it remains closed. All these are barriers between the heart and Allah, in different degrees, all resulting from rebellion against Allah.

Sins are the messengers of disbelief, and each act of disobedience brings greater sins closer to us. As one sins leads to another, one state of rebellion leads to another until one reaches ends that he never dreamt he would. The *ayahs* that criticize the nonbelievers may not be talking about us today; but unless we keep returning to Allah, they may one day!

The polished heart

The *hadith* mentions three things that polish the heart and return it to its health: stop the wrong we're doing, ask Allah for forgiveness, and repent. *Tawbah* (repentance) embeds in it the sense of regretting the act and intending never to go back to it. This treatment is the cleansing that eviscerates the trace of sin. Just like when we wash our clothes or polish our valuables, *tawbah* restores the brilliance of our *iman* and the energy of the living heart. *Tawbah* is needed constantly, a daily and even an hourly obligation of returning to Allah and asking for forgiveness. We need it because we make mistakes all the time and we need this cleanse to maintain the soundness of our hearts. This is why the Prophet ﷺ explains in the next *hadith* (see *Hadith Twenty Nine*) that he repented to Allah a hundred times every day.

The heart is like a mirror, and when it is clear, it presents an honest reflection of the world around it. It sees the truth as such and falsehood as such, without distortions or exaggerations. When rust starts to cover this mirror, it loses its ability of honest representation; you only see the ugliness of the rust every time you look. This rusty mirror fails to reflect reality as a rusty heart fails to see the truth.

The clean heart is very sensitive to sin. Any small sin bothers it because sin contradicts its *imanic* nature; the heart is naturally repulsed by it. The heart can move to become hypersensitive to sin, sensing it even when there are no clear signs of it. The heart can feel that there is something wrong when the senses cannot yet detect or anticipate it. This internal suspicion is not reliable enough on its own to prove the sinfulness of something, but it can be a sign that Allah grants to His pious worshippers to protect and guide them, and protect and guide through them. But this heart is reserved for those who are very close to Allah, those who guard their senses and protect their hearts from what angers Allah. When the heart surrenders to its Creator, Allah guides and protects this heart in ways that escape our expectations and comprehension. May Allah grant us these hearts and protect us from all evil.

HADITH TWENTY-NINE

الحديث التاسع والعشرون

Come back to your heart

قالَ رسولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ: «إِنَّهُ لَيُغانُ عَلى قَلْبي وإِنِّي لأَسْتَغْفِرُ اللهَ في اليَومِ مِائةَ مَرَّةٍ»
رواه مسلم (٢٧٠٢).

The Prophet ﷺ said: «There is at times a thin shade that comes upon my heart, and I ask Allah for forgiveness a hundred times a day.»

Reported by Muslim (2702).

Commentary

The heart needs Allah for its health and happiness. When the heart grows distant from Allah, it begins to feel the pain and anguish of separation. Distance from Allah is the death of our hearts. Returning to Allah with sincere forgiveness is one of the easiest and quickest ways to retrieve our hearts from the grasp of Shaytan and worldly intoxication.

The heart and separation

The Prophet ﷺ teaches us in this *hadith* something very important about how much our hearts need Allah. He tells us that his heart, the most pious and sensitive of hearts, experiences something like a shade or cover over it. The word that the Prophet ﷺ used to describe this cover was *ghayn*, which is close in spelling and meaning to the word for a cloud (*ghaym*). *Ghayn* is the thinnest possible covering that comes upon the heart. But where does it come from?

Our hearts can reach great heights of *iman* when they are in the midst of worship. When we are praying or listening to the Quran, our hearts are closest to Allah, at their purest, and are most responsive to His commands. But this state is not one that can last a whole day. Because of our human nature, we have to tend to our different needs and obligations. We have other commitments that require our attention, and our hearts must spend time on them. This distance from Allah, unavoidable at times, introduces a thin layer around our hearts. The heart in that state is not as close to Allah, not as sensitive, and not as responsive as it was when it was worshiping Allah. The heart struggles daily with the temptations of the world, deals with people's harm and distractions, and plans. Naturally, all this decreases our *iman* and brings us down the high levels we had climbed during worship. The Sahabah noticed how their *iman* decreased when they were away from the Prophet ﷺ and that made them worry as the following *hadith* explains:

عَنْ حَنْظَلَةَ الْأُسَيِّدِيِّ قَالَ وَكَانَ مِنْ كُتَّابِ رَسُولِ اللهِ صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ لَقِيَنِي أَبُو بَكْرٍ فَقَالَ (كَيْفَ أَنْتَ يَا حَنْظَلَةُ؟) قَالَ قُلْتُ (نَافَقَ حَنْظَلَةُ) قَالَ (سُبْحَانَ اللهِ! مَا تَقُولُ؟) قَالَ قُلْتُ (نَكُونُ عِنْدَ رَسُولِ اللهِ صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يُذَكِّرُنَا بِالنَّارِ وَالْجَنَّةِ حَتَّى كَأَنَّا رَأْيُ عَيْنٍ فَإِذَا خَرَجْنَا مِنْ عِنْدِ رَسُولِ اللهِ صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ عَافَسْنَا الْأَزْوَاجَ وَالْأَوْلَادَ وَالضَّيْعَاتِ فَنَسِينَا كَثِيرًا) قَالَ أَبُو بَكْرٍ (فَوَاللهِ إِنَّا لَنَلْقَى مِثْلَ هَذَا) فَانْطَلَقْتُ أَنَا وَأَبُو بَكْرٍ حَتَّى دَخَلْنَا عَلَى رَسُولِ اللهِ صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قُلْتُ (نَافَقَ حَنْظَلَةُ يَا رَسُولَ اللهِ) فَقَالَ رَسُولُ اللهِ صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ «وَمَا ذَاكَ؟» قُلْتُ (يَا رَسُولَ اللهِ نَكُونُ عِنْدَكَ تُذَكِّرُنَا بِالنَّارِ وَالْجَنَّةِ حَتَّى كَأَنَّا رَأْيُ عَيْنٍ فَإِذَا خَرَجْنَا مِنْ عِنْدِكَ عَافَسْنَا الْأَزْوَاجَ وَالْأَوْلَادَ وَالضَّيْعَاتِ نَسِينَا كَثِيراً) فَقَالَ رَسُولُ اللهِ صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ «وَالَّذِي نَفْسِي بِيَدِهِ

إِنْ لَوْ تَدُومُونَ عَلَى مَا تَكُونُونَ عِنْدِي وَفِي الذِّكْرِ لَصَافَحَتْكُمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ عَلَى فُرُشِكُمْ وَفِي طُرُقِكُمْ وَلَكِنْ يَا حَنْظَلَةُ سَاعَةً وَسَاعَةً» ثَلَاثَ مَرَّاتٍ.

رواه مسلم (٢٧٥٠).

Hanzalah Al-Usayyidi رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُ who was one of the scribes of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: I met Abu Bakr رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُ and he said: "How are you O Hanzalah?" I said: "Hanzalah has become a hypocrite." He said: "*Subhana Allah*! What are you saying?" I said: "When we are in the company of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and he reminds us of Hellfire and Jannah, we feel as if we are seeing them with our very eyes. But when we are away from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, we attend to our wives, our children, our business, and we forget a lot." Abu Bakr رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُ said: "By Allah, I also experience the same thing." So Abu Bakr and I went to Messenger of Allah ﷺ and I said to him: "O Messenger of Allah ﷺ, Hanzalah has become a hypocrite." The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: «Why is that?» I said: "O Messenger of Allah, when we are in your company, you remind us of Hellfire and Jannah, and we feel as if we are seeing them with our own eyes." But when we go away from you and attend to our wives, children and business, we forget a lot. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ then said: «By Him in Whose Hand is my life, if you remain in the same state like when you were in my presence and are busy in remembering Allah, the angels will shake hands with you in your beds and in your roads. But O Hanzalah, an hour like this and an hour like that,» repeating it three times.

Reported by Muslim (2750).

The movement between the world and worship is necessary, but it does diminish the *iman* we acquire when we are worshiping Allah. The world and the distance from Allah do introduce a thin layer around the heart. If the heart surrenders to it, it grows thicker with time. Allah says:

أَلَمۡ يَأۡنِ لِلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ أَن تَخۡشَعَ قُلُوبُهُمۡ لِذِكۡرِ ٱللَّهِ
وَمَا نَزَلَ مِنَ ٱلۡحَقِّ وَلَا يَكُونُواْ كَٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُواْ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ مِن قَبۡلُ
فَطَالَ عَلَيۡهِمُ ٱلۡأَمَدُ فَقَسَتۡ قُلُوبُهُمۡۖ وَكَثِيرٞ مِّنۡهُمۡ فَٰسِقُونَ ﴿١٦﴾

> Hasn't the time come for the hearts of the believers to be affected by Allah's Reminder and the revealed truth, and not be like those who received the Scripture before whose hearts hardened because a long time passed over them? And many of them were disobedient to Allah.
>
> Al-Hadid (Q57:16)

The longer one spends away from Allah and His reminders, the harder their heart gets. The thin soft layer turns into a hardened heart. Abu Musa al-Ash'ari رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُ had this *ayah* and its warning in mind when he advised the pious people of Basra:

بَعَثَ أَبُو مُوسَى الْأَشْعَرِيُّ إِلَى قُرَّاءِ أَهْلِ الْبَصْرَةِ فَدَخَلَ عَلَيْهِ ثَلَاثُمِائَةِ رَجُلٍ
قَدْ قَرَءُوا الْقُرْآنَ فَقَالَ (أَنْتُمْ خِيَارُ أَهْلِ الْبَصْرَةِ وَقُرَّاؤُهُمْ فَاتْلُوهُ وَلَا يَطُولَنَّ
عَلَيْكُمُ الْأَمَدُ فَتَقْسُوَ قُلُوبُكُمْ كَمَا قَسَتْ قُلُوبُ مَنْ كَانَ قَبْلَكُم)
رواه مسلم (١٠٥٠).

> Abu Musa al-Ash'ari sent for the reciters of Basra, so they came to him and they were three hundred men who learnt the Qur'an. He said: "You are the best among the inhabitants of Basra and the reciters of the Qur'an among them. So continue to recite it, and don't let too long of a time pass [without reciting it] or your hearts will harden as the hearts of those before you did."

Reported by Muslim (1050).

The nimbleness of the heart needs the continuous reminders of Allah, the medicine that wards off the corruption of the world and the desires of the self. Without these reminders, it cannot stay healthy or alive.

Let's go back to the thin layer that the Prophet ﷺ mentioned. The Prophet ﷺ would achieve great levels of *iman* and proximity to Allah in his worship. But he had to step into the world and deal with the community and its needs and problems. He had to be with his family and eat and drink with them, all necessary requisites of being a human. These human activities interrupt the worship of Allah, and the heart could not be expected to achieve the same levels of *iman* as it did while it was alone with Allah.

His living heart sensed the intrusion of this thin layer over his heart, and he considered this a regression that needed to be remedied. Though it is natural, the piety of the Prophet ﷺ recognized the great esteem and gratitude that Allah deserves, and viewed this distraction of the heart as something needing forgiveness. It was a shortcoming compared to the Majesty of Allah and how much we owe Him. So as soon as he felt it or as a regimen to stave it, he would remember Allah the Most High as often as he could. This remembrance restores the *imanic* connection of the heart and reminds it of its Creator; it allows it to retain as much of its *iman* while it is in the world. The heart of the Prophet ﷺ felt the slightest distance from Allah and could not tolerate it. The *dhikr* of Allah kept his heart close to Him.

According to Ibn al-Qayyim in *Madarij al-Salikin* (vol. 3, p. 211), *ghayn* is the thinnest layer that covers the heart, and is reserved for the Prophets of Allah. The second type of covering is that of *ghaym* (cloud), and this happens to the believers (see *Hadith Five*). The third one is *Ran*, and this is the reward of the unfortunate for their misdeeds (see *Hadith Twenty Eight*). Ibn al-Qayyim then moves to count ten barriers or coverings that stand between us and Allah. They are:

1. Denial of Allah and His names and attributes.
2. Worshiping other than Allah.
3. Innovation in creed.
4. Innovation in actions.
5. Major internal sins like arrogance, envy, and showing off.
6. Major external sins (e.g. fornication and alcohol), which he deemed less severe than the major internal ones.
7. Minor sins.
8. Excessive indulgence in permissible matters.
9. Unawareness that we were created to worship Allah and that He deserves constant thanks, worship, and remembrance.
10. That which stands between the diligent worshiper and Allah.

He explains (pp. 211–212) that there are four sources to these barriers: Shaytan, desire, the self, and the world. And it is not possible to reach Allah without overcoming them. One overcomes the obstacle of the world with *zuhd* (disinclination) and certainty that he is created for the Hereafter; this chases away the love of the world from his heart. He fights Shaytan by abandoning his desire, since Shaytan lurks behind it, and fights his desire by resolving to abide by Allah's commands and abandoning what contradicts them. And he fights his self with the medicine of sincerity, where he speaks and moves only for Allah's sake.

One of the valuable lessons of this *hadith* is the greater insights Allah gives us when we climb the ladder of *iman* and are closer to Him. We begin to be more aware of our hearts and what is happening to them. We begin to notice the slightest contamination, and we rush to remove any barrier between us and Allah. The Companion, Anas ibn Malik رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ said:

> إنكم لتعملون أعمالًا هي أدقُّ في أعينِكم منَ الشَّعرِ إن كنا لنعدُّها على عهدِ النبيِّ صلَّى اللهُ عليهِ وسلَّمَ من الموبقاتِ.
>
> رواه البخاري (٦٤٩٢)
>
> Indeed you are committing deeds that are thinner in your eyes than hair but we used to consider them at the time of the Prophet ﷺ great destructive sins.
>
> Reported by al-Bukhari (6492).

The greater your *iman* and piety is, the greater your sensitivity will be to all that angers Allah and takes you away from Him. And it is more likely then, that you will do something about it.

Asking for forgiveness

In this *hadith*, the Prophet ﷺ specifically mentioned asking Allah for forgiveness as an effective remedy for this *ghayn*. We ask Allah for forgiveness for our shortcomings and inability to thank Him and worship Him as we should. We ask Him for forgiveness because of how much we've forgotten Him and how much we love and seek the *dunya*. We ask Him for forgiveness because our hearts should be His but instead they are with another. We ask Him for forgiveness, so He can help us overcome our weakness and revive our hearts.

In another *hadith*, the Sahabah report to us the exact words of the Prophet ﷺ:

> إنْ كُنَّا لنعدُّ لرسولِ اللهِ صلَّى اللهُ عليْهِ وسلَّمَ في المجلسِ يقولُ «ربِّ اغفرْ لي وتبْ عليَّ إنَّكَ أنتَ التوابُ الرحيمُ» مائةَ مرةٍ.
>
> رواه أبو داود (١٥١٦) وصححه الألباني (صحيح أبي داود ١٥١٦)
>
> We used to count the Prophet ﷺ saying a hundred times in one sitting: «O my Rabb, forgive me and accept my repentance for

> You are the Oft-Accepter of repentance, the Most Merciful.»
>
> Reported by Abu Dawud (1516) and al-Albani declared it *sahih* (*Sahih Abi Dawud*, 1516).

Or you can say according to another narration:

> (كَانَ تُعَدُّ لِرَسُولِ اللهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فِي الْمَجْلِسِ الْوَاحِدِ مِائَةُ مَرَّةٍ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يَقُومَ «رَبِّ اغْفِرْ لِي وَتُبْ عَلَيَّ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ التَّوَّابُ الغَفُورُ»
>
> رواه الترمذي (٣٤٣٤) وصححه الألباني (صحيح الترمذي ٣٤٣٤).
>
> It would be counted that the Prophet ﷺ would say a hundred times in one sitting before he leaves: «O my Rabb, forgive me and accept my repentance for You are the Oft-Accepter of repentance, the Most Forgiving.»
>
> Reported by al-Tirmidhi (3434) and al-Albani declared it *sahih* (*Sahih al-Tirmidhi*, 3434).

We can alternate between these two *du'as*, giving us different noble names and attributes of Allah to beseech Him with for forgiveness and assistance.

Dhikr (the remembrance of Allah) is one of the very first steps to take to change ourselves and draw nearer to Allah. It helps us strengthen our *iman* when we're weak, and we can use it to build up our good deeds and good habits. Abdullah ibn Mas'ud رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ said:

> عن عبدِ اللَّهِ بنِ مسعودٍ قالَ: (إنَّ اللَّهَ قسمَ بينَكم أخلاقَكم كما قسَّمَ بينَكم أرزاقَكم وإنَّ اللَّهَ تعالى يعطي المالَ من أحبَّ ومن لا يحبُّ ولا يعطي الإيمانَ إلَّا من يحبُّ فمن ضنَّ بالمالِ أن ينفقَهُ وخافَ العدوَّ أن يجاهدَهُ وهابَ اللَّيلَ أن يُكابدَهُ فليُكثر من قولِ لا إلَهَ إلَّا اللَّهُ وسبحانَ اللَّهِ والحمدُ للَّهِ واللَّهُ أكبرُ)
>
> صحيح الأدب المفرد (٢٠٩).

> Allah divided your character amongst you as He divided your provisions, and Allah grants wealth to whom He loves and whom He doesn't but only grants *iman* to whom He loves. So, whoever is too miserly to spend money (i.e. charity), fears to fight the enemy, and bearing the night [prayer] is too great for him then let him say often *La ilaha illa Allah*, *Subhana Allah*, *Alhamdulillah*, and *Allahu Akbar*.
>
> *Sahih al-Adab al-Mufrad* (209).

Let us engage in more *dhikr* of Allah, and let us start coming closer to Him. It is as easy as moving your tongue right now. So, start. You will feel better as soon as you begin.

HADITH THIRTY

الحديث الثلاثون

Detach your heart from the world

قالَ رسولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ: «مَنْ كَانَتِ الدُّنْيا هَمَّهُ فَرَّقَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ أَمْرَهُ وَجعَلَ فَقْرَهُ بَيْنَ عَيْنَيْهِ ولَمْ يَأْتِهِ مِنَ الدُّنْيا إلَّا ما كُتِبَ لَهُ ومَنْ كانَتِ الآخِرَةُ نِيَّتَهُ جَمَعَ اللَّهُ لَهُ أَمْرَهُ وجَعلَ غِناهُ في قَلبِهِ وأَتَتْهُ الدُّنْيا وَهِيَ راغِمَةٌ»

رواه ابن ماجه (٤١٠٥) واللفظ له والترمذي (٢٤٦٥) بلفظ (من كانت الآخرة همه) وجود إسناده العراقي وصححه الألباني (صحيح ابن ماجه ٤١٠٥).

The Prophet ﷺ said: «Whosoever's concern is the world, Allah will scatter his affairs for him and place poverty between his eyes, and he will only receive from the world that which has been written for him. And whosoever's intention is the Hereafter, Allah will gather his affairs for him, put richness in his heart, and the world will be forced to come to him.»

Reported by Ibn Majah (4105) and al-Tirmidhi (2456). Al-Iraqi declared its chain to be good, and al-Albani declared it *sahih* (*Sahih ibn Majah*, 4105).

Commentary

One of the greatest obstacles on the path of the seeker of the Hereafter is their attachment to this world. Not only does this attachment rearrange our priorities in life, it also impoverishes our hearts and downgrades the quality of our life. This *hadith* teaches us how to make our hearts rich by bringing the Hereafter back to our lives.

What is your goal in this life?

Everyone has goals in their life, so what is yours? What is the thing that gets you out of bed in the morning, excites you, and keeps you going? What is it that you want to accomplish with your short stay on this planet? (Take a minute and think about what these goals might be. You can write them down in a journal for later analysis and plan development.)

Humans come up with different answers to these questions, honest and made-up, but they all point to the fact that goals are part of what defines us as humans. The Prophet ﷺ said:

> «أَصْدَقُها حارِثٌ وهمَّامٌ»
>
> رواه وأبو داود (٤٩٥٠) والنسائي وصححه الألباني في صحيح أبي داود (٤٩٥٠) وصحيح الأدب المفرد (٦٢٩).
>
> «The truest of them [names] are Harith [doer] and Hammam [intender].»
>
> Reported by Abu Dawud (4950) and al-Bukhari in *al-Adab al-Mufrad* . Al-Albani declared it *sahih* (*Sahih Abi Dawud*, 4950 and *Sahih al-Adab al-Mufrad*, 629).

Our life testifies to the truth of this *hadith*: we're always making plans and acting on them. There is no day that goes by without this. Living without a goal is living an empty life, a shadow of a life that hopes for nothing and is waiting for nothing. Such a life spells internal death. Even if our bodies are still alive, it is a life without meaning. Depression creeps into our lives when there is nothing to accomplish and look forward to. Embracing life goals is what makes our lives worth living, and we all should have them. But what goals should we embrace?

Humans come up with very different goals for their lives, depending on their predilections, talents, experiences, and circumstances. There are the altruistic goals and the personal ones, the long-term and shortterm, and the beneficial and harmful. These goals and categories mix and intersect, and sometimes clash and cancel each other. In the midst of these competing considerations and motivations, rises the need for us to sift through our many goals and adopt them in a coherent and meaningful way. The best way to do this is to prioritize them according to the benefit they bring in the Hereafter. This is an all-encompassing and edifying categorization. It is all-encompassing because it subsumes all that we do in our life: down to every small detail. And it is edifying because it uplifts our character and behavior. It not only helps us to set our goals but to evaluate them as well.

The seeker of the world

Seeking this world is the most common goal on this earth. Earthly beauty and glamor steal our hearts, and we seek them more than anything else. We may be attracted to different parts of the *dunya*—wealth, sex, fame, power, praise, etc.—but they are all part of the pleasure of this life. The problem is not in our natural desire for some these things but in how they become our exclusive and foremost goals.

Each destination (or goal) sets its own priorities and demands, and it offers its own interpretations of the world around us. A Wall Street banker sees the world and reacts to it differently than a Chinese villager. Different goals converge and diverge based on the values they promote and their assessment of human existence. Seeking this world is a different and distinct destination from seeking the next one. Allah says:

مَن كَانَ يُرِيدُ ٱلْحَيَوٰةَ ٱلدُّنْيَا وَزِينَتَهَا نُوَفِّ إِلَيْهِمْ أَعْمَٰلَهُمْ فِيهَا وَهُمْ
فِيهَا لَا يُبْخَسُونَ ﴿١٥﴾ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ لَيْسَ لَهُمْ فِى ٱلْءَاخِرَةِ إِلَّا ٱلنَّارُ ۖ
وَحَبِطَ مَا صَنَعُوا۟ فِيهَا وَبَٰطِلٌ مَّا كَانُوا۟ يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٦﴾

> Whoever desires the life of this world and its adornments—We will fully repay them for their deeds in it, and they will not be

> deprived in it. Those are the ones for whom there is nothing in the Hereafter but the Fire. And lost is what they did in it, and worthless is what they used to do.
>
> Hud (Q11:15–16)

Allah declares in these *ayahs* how this world can be at odds with the Hereafter. Those who work exclusively for this life will receive their fair share of it. But since they didn't work for the Hereafter nor even desire it, all their deeds will expire with the world they lived for and they will meet Allah empty-handed. There can only be one ultimate concern in our lives, one that overrides and organizes all other concerns. And the Hereafter and this world cannot both occupy this same space. Allah makes it clear that these are two distinct choices when He says:

مَن كَانَ يُرِيدُ حَرْثَ ٱلْـَٔاخِرَةِ نَزِدْ لَهُۥ فِى حَرْثِهِۦ ۖ وَمَن
كَانَ يُرِيدُ حَرْثَ ٱلدُّنْيَا نُؤْتِهِۦ مِنْهَا وَمَا لَهُۥ فِى ٱلْـَٔاخِرَةِ
مِن نَّصِيبٍ ٢٠

> Whoever desires the harvest of the Hereafter, We will increase him in his harvest. And whoever desires the harvest of this world, We will give him from it, and he will have no portion in the Hereafter.
>
> Al-Shura (Q42:20)

Allah tells us that the one who desires the reward of the next life and works for it will receive help and support from Allah and his reward will be multiplied. But the one who only desires this life and has no interest in the next one will receive his rewards here and miss out completely on the blessings of the Hereafter. The worldly portion that he will receive is the one that Allah has already destined for him.

Allah says:

> مَّن كَانَ يُرِيدُ ٱلۡعَاجِلَةَ عَجَّلۡنَا لَهُۥ فِيهَا مَا نَشَآءُ لِمَن نُّرِيدُ ثُمَّ
> جَعَلۡنَا لَهُۥ جَهَنَّمَ يَصۡلَىٰهَا مَذۡمُومٗا مَّدۡحُورٗا ١٨ وَمَنۡ أَرَادَ
> ٱلۡأٓخِرَةَ وَسَعَىٰ لَهَا سَعۡيَهَا وَهُوَ مُؤۡمِنٞ فَأُوْلَٰٓئِكَ كَانَ
> سَعۡيُهُم مَّشۡكُورٗا ١٩ كُلّٗا نُّمِدُّ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ وَهَٰٓؤُلَآءِ مِنۡ
> عَطَآءِ رَبِّكَۚ وَمَا كَانَ عَطَآءُ رَبِّكَ مَحۡظُورًا ٢٠

> Whoever desires the immediate life, We will hasten for him what We will to whom We want, then We will appoint for him Hell, which he will burn in, disgraced and humiliated. But whoever desires the Hereafter and puts the effort due to it while he is a believer, then the effort of those will be thanked. To each, of these and those, We bestow from the bounties of your Rabb. And the bounties of your Rabb have never been restricted.
>
> Al-Isra' (Q17:18–20)

This affirms the wisdom we find in the *hadith*: excessive concern for this life doesn't increase our gains but rather our troubles and burdens. The world tends to overwhelm with its demands. The more you love this life, the more it pulls at you from many, many directions and paths. And this will eventually tear you apart. The Prophet ﷺ teaches us in the *hadith* that Allah will leave the one who opts for this world to taste the fruits of his lowly choice. The world will devour him with its constant pressures and anxieties. And on top of that, Allah will scatter his concerns apart so that he chases after them in all directions. He loses any peace of mind because he's constantly worried, busy, and seldom contented. This is simply the world showing its true nature to all its seekers.

Worrying about this world is its painful recompense for those who love it. They worry about mishaps in their future and are sad over the losses of their past. They are physically and, more importantly, mentally exhausted, because of how much the world asks of them. We love the world but so does everybody else, and they fight us over it. And when you manage to get something out of the claws and teeth of everyone else, you start desiring more. And so does everybody else! And the battle rages on, intensifying as your gains increase. The more you desire, the more you'll be tormented in pursuit of never-ending gains. Then before you know it, death sneaks up and snatches everything away.

The more that you chase this world, the more that it will seem like it's running away from you. This is the poverty that Allah promised those who put their trust in the world instead of Him. What they own is never enough because they pursue it with greed. As soon as they have something, it loses its appeal because there is always something better elsewhere, and there is always another who owns more and has accomplished more. This life is built on competition and rivalry. Even if life gives you the chance to enjoy something, it will soon remind you that you can lose it: either it will expire or someone else will take it. Dullness attacks every new thing and steals its shine and appeal. Greed makes the wealthiest person feel poor and miserable, unhappy and empty. This is the reality of the world and the pain it brings, a pain that everyone should flee from were they not so drunk on its false promises.

The divine truth demands sacrifices. When it conflicts with worldly desires, *dunya* seekers abandon the truth and oppose it. Allah says:

فَأَعْرِضْ عَن مَّن تَوَلَّىٰ عَن ذِكْرِنَا وَلَمْ يُرِدْ إِلَّا ٱلْحَيَوٰةَ ٱلدُّنْيَا ﴿٢٩﴾
ذَٰلِكَ مَبْلَغُهُم مِّنَ ٱلْعِلْمِ ۚ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَن ضَلَّ عَن
سَبِيلِهِۦ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنِ ٱهْتَدَىٰ ﴿٣٠﴾

> So turn away from whoever turns his back on Our reminder and desires not except the worldly life. That is their level of knowledge. Indeed, your Lord knows best who is misguided from His way, and He knows best who is guided.
>
> Al-Najm (Q53:29–30)

Allah announces the superficial life and limited wisdom of this group to humanity and commands us to turn away from them. In the sight of Allah, worldly preoccupations betray deep ignorance and leave one closed to the truth. Their yearning for this world leaves no place in their hearts for Allah. The seekers of this life only know it and care about it. This is why any seeker of the Hereafter cannot be at the same time a seeker of the world.

The seeker of the Hereafter

In the aforementioned *ayahs,* Allah promised the seeker of the Hereafter help and support. The *hadith* explains this support by pointing out that Allah will take care of his worldly preoccupations, enrich his heart, and bring the world crawling to him.

The one who worries about the Hereafter (what Allah wants Him to worry about)will see Allah taking care of his worldly worries, including *rizq* (sustenance). Allah will bring near his worldly matters and affairs, so he doesn't have to waste time and energy chasing after them. Allah doesn't want him to be consumed by worldly distractions so He simplifies his for him. If someone were doing important work for you that you appreciate, you would want them to stay focused on their work. To help them with this, you will try to remove as many distractions as possible. Since Allah loves the devotion of those who seek Him, He minimizes their worldly preoccupations, so they can stay close to Him.

This doesn't mean that this world will cease to molest and challenge these seekers; just consider the trials of all the Prophets of Allah. But what this means is that whatever the world throws at them, Allah will be there to support them and remove their pain and trouble. They just need to stay close to Him through it all.

Allah's promise to take care of the provision of His seekers is explained in the following *hadith*:

إن الله يقول «يا بن آدم تفرغ لعبادتي أملأ صدرك غنى وأسد فقرك وإلا

تفعل ملأت يديك شغلاً ولم أسد فقرك»

رواه أحمد (٨٦٩٦) والترمذي (٢٤٦٦) وصححه أحمد شاكر والألباني (صحيح الترمذي ٢٤٦٦).

> Allah says: «O child of Adam, devote yourself to my worship and I will fill your chest with richness and remove your poverty. But if you don't, I will fill your hands with work and not remove your poverty.»
>
> Reported by Ahmad (8696) and al-Tirmidhi (2466) and declared *sahih* by Ahmad Shakir and al-Albani (*Sahih al-Tirmidhi*, 2466).

The Prophet ﷺ explains in the *hadith* that Allah will fill the hands of the worldly seeker with work, which leaves him overworked and distraught. This is also a type of punishment. His extra work is an extra burden with no real fruit or gain. And he cannot escape a feeling of need and poverty, just like the main *hadith* of the chapter affirms. The one devoted to the worship of Allah receives the divine promise that his needs will be met, and his poverty overcome. More importantly, his heart will be filled with contentment and joy, so whatever he receives from Allah would be blessed, thanked, and celebrated. Many think that abandoning the worship of Allah and focusing on the *dunya* will make them rich; Allah promises us otherwise.

In the main *hadith* of the chapter, the Prophet ﷺ explained that the world will be forced to come to the religious seeker, whether the world likes it or not. The image here is of a subdued *dunya* that approaches the believer, in humility and submission. It comes whether the gatekeepers of worldly wealth like it or not, for the Master of the world commands it to serve His beloveds. The righteous will find that the world will turn to them, but they will turn away from it. Praise and fame will chase them, but they will run away from it. The rich and powerful will court them, but they will refuse their gifts, holding firm to the truth with their dignity and honor intact. The world will come to the religious unlike the way it comes to its seekers: to the first it comes as a servant, to the second it comes as a master.

Destinations and goals are like liquids that fill the heart. When the world is the final destination, it leaves little or no space for the Hereafter, and vice versa. Devotion to the Hereafter must develop with parallel emptying of the *dunya* from the heart. The one who only cares about wealth and fame has little time to give to anything else, even other important terrestrial matters such as family and quality of life. How could they then conceivably focus on the Hereafter with all of these dizzying worldly demands?

The emptying of the heart is a gradual process. It starts with paying more attention to Allah and the next life. This new focus begins to edge out the older ones and brings true life back to the heart. Certain steps are needed to help with this transformation:

1. Constant remembrance of Allah, which purifies the heart and elevates it above worldly preoccupations.
2. Mindful worship with the intention of getting closer to Allah and extracting benefit from our worship.
3. Counter the worries of this world by remembering the gravity of the Hereafter and that the troubles of this world are too trivial and short-lived.
4. Counter anxiety about the future with *tawakkul* on Allah and trust that He is the best caretaker and supporter. Let Him take care of your worries and focus on what pleases Him.
5. Counter greed and love of this world with remembrance of death and the expiration of all material possessions.
6. Counter the desire for the forbidden with remembering the anger and punishment of Allah and that an hour's joy is not worth even a second in Hellfire. Saying no now to the forbidden allows you

to enjoy greater pleasures in Heaven.

The richness of the heart

The greatest gift the believer gets in this *hadith* is a rich heart. A rich heart is one filled with contentment and peace, with happiness and gratitude for what Allah gave it and will continue to give it. It doesn't worry about the future because it has placed its trust in Allah, and who is better than Allah in the management of all affairs? It doesn't feel sad for worldly loss because it knows that what Allah destined, He did wisely and for our own benefit. It interprets all past events as manifestations of Allah's care and wisdom. And it doesn't burden itself much over current problems because it has relied on Allah in guiding it and removing its burdens. This heart knows that Allah will take care of it as long as it takes care of what Allah loves. The Prophet ﷺ said:

«مَنْ كانتِ الدنيا هِمَّته وسَدَمَه ولها شَخَصٌ وإيَّاها ينوي جَعل الله الفقْرَ بينَ عيْنَيْهِ وشتَّتَ عليه ضَيْعَتَهُ ولَمْ يأْتِه منها إلا ما كتِبَ لَهُ منها ومَنْ كانتِ الآخرةُ هِمَّتَه وسدَمه ولها شخص وإياها ينوي جعل الله عز وجل الغنى في قلبه وجمع عليه ضَيعتَه وأَتَتْهُ الدنيا وهي صاغرة»

رواه البزار والطبراني وابن حبان وصححه الألباني (السلسلة الصحيحة ١٧٠٧).

«Whosoever's concern is the world and it is his preoccupation (i.e. what makes him sad and regretful), his goal, and he moves for its sake; Allah will place poverty between his eyes, scatter his affairs for him, and only the part that was written for him of the world will come to him. And whosoever's concern is the Hereafter and it is his preoccupation (i.e. what makes him sad and regretful), his goal, and he moves for its sake; Allah will place richness in his heart, collect his affairs for him, and the world will humbly come to him.»

> Reported by al-Bazzar, al-Tabarai, and Ibn Hibban. Al-Albani declared it *sahih* (*al-Silsilah al-Sahihah*, 1707).

If one moves for Allah (for His sake) and by Allah (according to what He loves), why should he ever think that Allah will abandon him? Does Allah abandon His loved ones? Love Allah and let Him take care of you.

The paradox of this life is that it tries to convince us that we need so much of it to be happy, even though the opposite is true. The recipe for happiness is not in how much you (could) have but in how you receive and think about what you already own. The Prophet ﷺ said:

> «من أصبح منكم آمِنًا في سِرْبِه معافًى في جسدِه عنده قوتُ يومِه فكأنما حِيزَتْ له الدنيا بحذافِيرِها»
>
> رواه الترمذي (٢٣٤٦) وابن ماجه (٤١٤١) وحسنه الألباني (صحيح الترغيب ٨٣٣).
>
> «Whoever among you wakes up safe in his family, healthy in his body, and has the food of his day, it would be as if the entire world has been given to him.»
>
> Reported by al-Tirmidhi (2346) and Ibn Majah (4141) and declared *hasan* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Targhib*, 833).

These three are the ingredients of a happy life; nothing more is needed if one only opens his eyes and heart. If one is safe and secure among family, healthy, and has enough to eat, this person has captured all that he needs from the *dunya* for that day. If we have these three, there is no reason for us to be sad, angry, or anxious! The Prophet ﷺ stated that this person need only to have enough food for one day, which in itself is a blessing. Because he doesn't have extra, he doesn't worry about what to do with it: he places his trust in Allah, not in what he owns. The little that this person has allows him to sleep restfully at night because he is not consumed by worry. He realizes Allah's great blessing on him, and this fills him with joy and gratitude. The more we have of this world, the more we are burdened by it. How incredible it is that we take all these great and obvious blessings for granted and fail to thank Allah for them, not noticing how precious they are until we lose them. How incredible it is that this entire world boils down to three simple blessings!

Putting Allah in our hearts and making the Hereafter the goal of our life is how we develop rich hearts. A heart that is close to Allah weathers the troubles of this life and prevails over them. This heart does not collapse under the weight of the world because Allah carries its burdens. This heart tastes the sweetness of *iman* and knows that nothing in this world could be sweeter, more satisfying, or more lasting.

Project

Ask yourself what your life goals are and make them part of the pursuit of the next life. If you don't have such goals, develop and adopt some and anchor them to the pleasure of Allah and the high ranks of Jannah. This could be pursuing a degree or career for the sake of Allah, helping others around you, spreading Islam, or any other noble goal that gives your life meaning, direction, and brings you closer to Allah. Pray to Allah to help you develop such goals and to assist in pursuing them all to way to Jannah *insha-Allah*.

HADITH THIRTY-ONE

الحديث الواحد والثلاثون

Remove hatred from your heart

قالَ رسولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ: «نضَّرَ اللَّهُ امْرَأً سَمِعَ مَقالَتِي فَبَلَّغَها فَرُبَّ حامِلِ فِقْهٍ غَيْرُ فَقيهٍ ورُبَّ حامِلِ فِقهٍ إلى مَن هوَ أَفْقَهُ مِنهُ ثَلاثٌ لا يَغِلُّ عَلَيْهِنَّ قَلْبُ امْرِئٍ مُسْلِمٍ إخْلاصُ العَمَلِ لِلَّهِ والنُّصْحُ لِأَئِمَّةِ المُسلِمينَ ولُزومُ جَماعَتِهِم فإنَّ دَعْوَتَهُم تُحِيطُ مَنْ وَرائَهُم»

رواه أحمد (١٣٣٥٠) وابن ماجة (٣٠٥٦) واللفظ له والترمذي (٢٦٥٨) وصححه ابن حجر والألباني (السلسلة الصحيحة ٤٠٤) والوادعي (الصحيح المسند ٣٥٨).

The Prophet ﷺ said: «May Allah beautify the face of someone who hears my words and conveys them, for there may be a carrier of knowledge that lacks understanding and a carrier of knowledge to another who has more understanding than he does. Three things remove hatred from the heart of a Muslim: sincerity to Allah in action, advice to Muslim leaders, and adhering to the *jamaʿah*, for indeed their call covers all of them.»

Reported by Ahmad (13350), Ibn Majah (3056), and al-Tirmidhi (2658). Ibn Hajar, al-Albani (*al-Silsilah al-Sahihah*, 404), and al-Wadiʿi (*al-Sahih al-Musnad*, 358) declared it *sahih*.

Commentary

This comprehensive *hadith* guides us to how the heart of a Muslim should be and how it can get there. It lists three attributes that negate hatred and treachery from the heart, and sets the believer on the path of personal and public edification in pursuit of the pleasure of Allah.

The bright face

The revelation of Allah is the light of the hearts, the earth, and all of existence. It rescues us from the ravages of darkness, chaos, and doubt to the shores of certainty and peace. This light leaves its glow on our lives, bodies, and face when we embrace it and live by it. Allah says:

سِيمَاهُمۡ فِي وُجُوهِهِم مِّنۡ أَثَرِ ٱلسُّجُودِۚ

Their mark is on their faces from the trace of prostration.
Al-Fath (Q48:29)

Their *Salah* and *sujud* leaves them with increased humility, piety, and righteousness, and this becomes evident in their entire life and behavior. In addition, Allah leaves them with an external trace of piety: light and happiness on the face, an affable personality, and a pleasant appearance.

This will happen on the Day of Judgment too when Allah whitens the faces of the righteous and blackens the faces of the wicked:

يَوۡمَ تَبۡيَضُّ وُجُوهٞ وَتَسۡوَدُّ وُجُوهٞۚ فَأَمَّا ٱلَّذِينَ ٱسۡوَدَّتۡ وُجُوهُهُمۡ
أَكَفَرۡتُم بَعۡدَ إِيمَٰنِكُمۡ فَذُوقُواْ ٱلۡعَذَابَ بِمَا كُنتُمۡ تَكۡفُرُونَ ١٠٦
وَأَمَّا ٱلَّذِينَ ٱبۡيَضَّتۡ وُجُوهُهُمۡ فَفِي رَحۡمَةِ ٱللَّهِۖ هُمۡ فِيهَا خَٰلِدُونَ

On the Day when some faces will turn white and some faces will turn black. As for those whose faces turned black, "Did you disbelieve after your belief? Then taste the punishment for what you used to reject." But as for those whose faces turned white, they will be included in the mercy of Allah, abiding therein eternally.
Al Imran (Q3:106–107)

As it will be on the Last Day, those who disobey Allah in this world will receive their share of darkness on their face, stemming from the darkness in their hearts. The more one disobeys Allah, the greater this external darkness will be. Justly, Allah reveals on the faces what people try to hide in their hearts and sets this as a sign for all with open eyes and hearts.

The Prophet ﷺ made a special *du'a* for Allah to beautify the face of one who carries his words and delivers them as is. The word "*nadrah*" in Arabic signifies beauty, happiness, and radiance. The one who carries the truth has its light and happiness in their heart, and they spread both when they convey it to others. Consequently, Allah clothes them with external radiance and happiness.

Allah establishes a link between our internal and external states when He says:

فَوَقَىٰهُمُ ٱللَّهُ شَرَّ ذَٰلِكَ ٱلۡيَوۡمِ وَلَقَّىٰهُمۡ نَضۡرَةٗ وَسُرُورٗا ١١

So Allah will protect them from the evil of that Day and give
them radiance and happiness.
Al-Insan (Q76:11)

Their happiness on the Day of Judgment will be in their hearts and the radiance will be on their faces: the second is the product of the first. The believers in this world will also have their share of this happiness and radiance in accordance with their *iman* and good deeds. The more one obeys Allah and is close to Him, the more that they will have of this beauty and radiance. One of the best ways to attain physical radiance and honor in this life is to spread and teach the *hadith* of the Prophet ﷺ. Sufyan ibn 'Uyaynah said:

قَالَ سُفْيَانَ بْنِ عُيَيْنَةَ: (مَا مِنْ أَحَدٍ يَطْلُبُ الْحَدِيثَ إِلَّا وَفِي وَجْهِهِ نَضْرَةٌ)
شرف أصحاب الحديث (ص١٩).

> There is no seeker of the *hadith* but there is radiance on their face.
>
> *Sharaf Ashab al-Hadith* (p. 19).

The one who spreads *hadith* is doing what the Companions رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ

did, and that is one of the greatest goals to aspire to in this life.

Conveying knowledge

The *hadith* carries in it great incentive to spread Islam and teach it to others. The transmitter of the teachings of the Prophet ﷺ will receive gifts of radiance and beauty, a reflection of the knowledge and *iman* that *hadith* builds in the hearts. If the outward reward is so pleasing, one can only imagine the beauty that Allah had deposited in their hearts and the rewards that await them in the next life.

The *hadith* outlines two cases where one may be delivering knowledge to someone who has more understanding than he does. The carrier of the truth may either lack understanding of what they carry or not understand it as well as the next recipient. The *hadith* urges us to teach what we know because the next person may be the one who extracts full benefit from what we have. It also teaches us humility: the transmitter who had first possession of the *hadith* shouldn't hesitate to learn from the recipient. *Fiqh*, or depth of understanding, is a gift from Allah, and some will have more than others. If one's intention is pure, they will follow the truth no matter where it came from and who said it.

One can glean from the *hadith* of the chapter the three conditions of conveying knowledge, which also happen to be the three acts that cleanse the heart. First, spreading knowledge must proceed with a sincere intention, for the sake of Allah and not any ulterior worldly goal. Second, the spreader of knowledge should do it desiring the best for people. His intent is sharing the truth and giving advice, even to the most rebellious, and he doesn't let his personal feelings derail his *da‘wah*. Finally, conveying the truth requires social interaction, and one must spread the truth within the community and not forsake them because of fear of rejection or harm.

Sincerity

The *hadith* of this chapter resembles another *hadith* of the Prophet ﷺ where he said:

> «إن الله يرضى لكم ثلاثا أن تعبدوه ولا تشركوا به شيئا وأن تعتصموا بحبل الله جميعا ولا تفرقوا وأن تناصحوا من ولاه الله أمركم»
>
> رواه مسلم (١٧١٥).
>
> «Allah is pleased with three things for you: He is pleased that you worship Him and not associate anything with Him, and that you take hold of the rope of Allah altogether and not divide, and that you give good counsel to those whom Allah gave authority over you.»
>
> Reported by Muslim (1715).

Ibn Taymiyyah commented on these two *hadiths* saying:

> وهذه الثلاث تجمع أصول الدين وقواعده وتجمع الحقوق التي لله ولعباده، وتنتظم مصالح الدنيا والآخرة. وبيان ذلك أن الحقوق قسمان: حق لله وحق لعباده، فحق الله أن نعبده ولا نشرك به شيئا، كما جاء لفظه في أحد الحديثين؛ وهذا معنى إخلاص العمل لله، كما جاء في الحديث الآخر. وحقوق العباد قسمان: خاص وعام؛ أما الخاص فمثل بر كل إنسان والديه، وحق زوجته وجاره؛ فهذه من فروع الدين؛ لأن المكلف قد يخلو عن وجوبها عليه؛ ولأن مصلحتها خاصة فردية. وأما الحقوق العامة فالناس نوعان: رعاة ورعية؛ فحقوق الرعاة مناصحتهم؛ وحقوق الرعية لزوم جماعتهم؛ فإن مصلحتهم لا تتم إلا باجتماعهم، وهم لا يجتمعون على ضلالة؛ بل مصلحة دينهم ودنياهم في اجتماعهم

> واعتصامهم بحبل الله جميعا؛ فهذه الخصال تجمع أصول الدين.
> مجموع الفتاوى (ج١ ص١٩).
>
> These three [acts] combine the foundations of religion and its basics, combine the rights that belong to Allah and His slaves, and subsume the benefits of this world and the Hereafter. What illustrates this is that rights are of two kinds: a right belonging to Allah and a right belonging to His slaves. It is the right of Allah that we worship Him and associate no one with Him, as the wording of one of the two *hadiths* states, and this is the meaning of sincerity for the sake of Allah in action as the other *hadith* states. The rights of the slaves are of two types: personal and public. The personal rights are like one's kindness to his parents and the rights of his wife and neighbor. These are from the branches of religion since the responsible adult [*mukallaf*] could be free of these obligations [his parents are dead or he's not married] and because their benefit is personal and individual. As for the public right, then people are of two types: the rulers and the ruled. The right of the rulers is to give advice to them and the right of the ruled is to adhere to the Muslim community since their wellbeing isn't complete until they unite, and they don't unite upon falsehood. Indeed, the good of their religion and their world is in their unity and adherence to the rope of Allah altogether. So, these attributes encompass the foundations of religion.
>
> *Majmu‘ al-Farawa* (vol. 1, p. 19).

Sincerity is a right that belongs to Allah. This is the greatest obligation we have, to worship Allah alone and no other. As there can be no Jannah without *tawhid*, there can be no pure and clean heart without *tawhid*. In fact, *shirk* brings in the greatest defects and diseases to the heart: it fills it with darkness, anger, frustration, and hostility. Rather than the heart submitting to the One True God, it is enslaved by so many other inferior beings that torment it and bring it distress and pain. A corrupted heart hates the truth and its bearers, and is inclined to corruption and its perpetrators. A sincere heart, on the other hand, loves the truth and desires its spread. A sincere heart loves Allah and His creation, and wishes them no ill or harm.

One of the many benefits of having *tawhid* and sincerity is that Allah protects the sincere heart from disease, sin, and harm. Allah says about Prophet Yusuf عَلَيْهِ ٱلسَّلَامُ:

كَذَٰلِكَ لِنَصْرِفَ عَنْهُ ٱلسُّوٓءَ وَٱلْفَحْشَآءَ ۚ
إِنَّهُۥ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا ٱلْمُخْلَصِينَ ﴿٢٤﴾

And so it was that We should protect him from evil and
immorality. Indeed, he was of Our chosen slaves.
Yusuf (Q12:24)

In another *qira'ah* [Quranic reading], the last word in this *ayah* is *al-mukhlisin*, (the sincere slaves). Allah protected Yusuf عَلَيْهِ ٱلسَّلَامُ from evil intents and the sin of adultery because of the strength of *tawhid* in his heart and how much he loved Allah. When he purified his heart, Allah selected him for His favors, elevated him, and protected him from Shaytan. Even Shaytan knew from the beginning that he had no power over those who are sincere. Allah says:

قَالَ رَبِّ بِمَآ أَغْوَيْتَنِى لَأُزَيِّنَنَّ لَهُمْ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ وَلَأُغْوِيَنَّهُمْ
أَجْمَعِينَ ﴿٣٩﴾ إِلَّا عِبَادَكَ مِنْهُمُ ٱلْمُخْلَصِينَ ﴿٤٠﴾

Iblis said: "My Rabb, because You have misled me, I will surely
make what's on earth attractive to them, and I will mislead
them all, except Your chosen slaves among them."
Al-Hijr (Q15:39–40)

Like the previous *ayah*, the other *qira'ah* is *al-mukhlisin*, the sincere ones. Shaytan's temptations and plots all fail to misguide or confuse the people of *tawhid* except in minor sins and when their *iman* is weak. Otherwise, Allah's protection foils the plots of Shaytan and their hearts remain pure.

Tawhid is the first step towards heart purification, and *shirk* is the greatest obstacle to its happiness. If we are seeking Allah's aid and protection, we have to pay greater attention to sincerity in our intentions and deeds, and erase shirk from our hearts and lives.

Advice to Muslim leaders

Advice is a right upon us towards every Muslim. Jarir ibn Abdullah رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُ said:

> بايعتُ النَّبيَّ صلَّى اللَّهُ عليهِ وسلَّمَ على النُّصحِ لِكُلِّ مسلمٍ.
>
> رواه البخاري (٢١٥٧) ومسلم (٥٦).
>
> I gave the pledge to the Prophet ﷺ to give advice to every Muslim.
>
> Reported by al-Bukhari (2157) and Muslim (56).

Nasihah is Arabic for desiring the best for the other, which includes giving them advice. This entails loving for every Muslim what we love for ourselves, not harming or cheating them, helping and protecting them, sharing with them our sincerest and best counsel, and reminding them of the truth when they forget. This is especially important when it comes to Muslim rulers, whose uprightness is the uprightness of all of society and whose corruption is the corruption of all of society. Giving advice to the rulers is part of the creed of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah, a corner stone in the building and maintenance of a righteous society. This happens to be the best way to remedy the mistakes and transgressions of Muslims rulers in particular and people with power and authority in general. The alternatives—which include public critique and mockery, revolutions, and armed rebellion—lead sooner or later to greater harm than the good they are trying to achieve. If we love for Muslims what we love for ourselves, and our intent is to bring the greatest benefit and prevent the greatest harm, we would not fail to offer our advice to all Muslims, rulers and ruled alike, in the way that best helps them accept the truth and not rebel against it.

Adhering to the Jama'ah

The Muslim *jama'ah* (community) encompasses all Muslim believers on this earth. This *jama'ah* is formed when people accept the truth, follow it, and don't deviate from it. They cooperate with each other in obeying Allah and reaching beneficial goals, guided and motivated by their love of Allah and the revelation He sent. Adhering to the Muslim *jama'ah* takes form in both belief and practice. In terms of belief, it takes place when we stay on the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ and don't innovating in Islam; it also takes place when we're part of the *Ummah* in its worship, such as Jumu'ah, Eid, and other public rituals and festivals. All these creedal and practical commitments promote love for other Muslims and the odium of betraying them.

Deviation and distance from the *jama'ah* creates animosity towards the majority of Muslims. *Bid'ah*, and falsehood in general, sets one apart from the rest of the Muslims, now and in the past. The innovator separates himself in belief and practice from the majority, believing everyone else to be inferior to him; he bases his loyalties on his innovation: he only loves other innovators like himself. This invariably leads to physical separation in worship and assembly from the majority of Muslims, creating distinct grouping based on shared falsehood. The clear consequence of all this is the creation of divisions in the *Ummah* and much ill will and friction. Treachery, injustice, and criminal activities are quick to follow.

One would not be alienated from the rest of the Muslims when they stay close to the *jamaʿah* in belief and practice. They would believe what the majority of Muslims in the past and present believe, and he would feel that he is part of the *Ummah* and not standing in opposition to it. He would have the purest thoughts regarding the Companions and the pious predecessors whom he sees as his role models and teachers. When the masses are ignorant or sinful, he teaches them with mercy and kindness as members of his big family and not as adversaries and opposition. He worships with everyone else and does not set for himself special or different religious rituals and gatherings. He bases his love and loyalty on who is closest to Allah and His Messenger ﷺ; he doesn't base it on who personally agrees or disagrees with him. He has true concern and love for his fellow Muslims, and lives to benefit them.

The last part of the *hadith* about the Muslim call could mean Islam itself or the *duʿa* that Muslims make. In either case, it means that this call includes all Muslims and acts as the fence that protects everyone behind it. They have Islam to unite them all, and they make *duʿa* for each other, which reaches and protects all. But when one steps out of the *jamaʿah*, he is no longer under the protection of Islam—i.e. he is likely to commit countless errors—and he isn't a beneficiary of the *duʿa* of other Muslims.

Removing illness and hatred from the heart

The *hadith* teaches three pillars that guarantee and sustain the happiness of the heart. Being right with Allah is the basis of it all, and it leads us to improve our relationships with the rest of humanity. When we give each their right according to what Allah commanded, there will be no lingering discomfort in our hearts or hatred for others. Our hearts will submit to their Creator and the truth He revealed, and they will not vie for worldly gains at the expense of the Hereafter. In fact, these hearts will give up some of their own rights at times to ensure the happiness and wellbeing of others, and for that Allah will fill them with joy, peace, and contentment. Straying from the truth and chasing after this world are the foundations of conflict on this earth and the hatred we see so much of around us today. It is possible to remove it all if we just come back to our Creator and surrender to His Infinite Wisdom.

HADITH THIRTY-TWO

الحديث الثاني والثلاثون

Beware of your tongue

قالَ رسولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ: «لا يَسْتَقيمُ إيمانُ عَبْدٍ حَتَّى يَسْتَقيمَ قَلْبُهُ ولا يَسْتَقيمُ قَلْبُهُ حَتَّى يَسْتَقيمَ لِسانُهُ ولا يَدْخُلُ الجَنَّةَ رَجُلٌ لا يَأْمُنُ جارُهُ بَوائِقَهُ»

رواه أحمد (١٣٠٤٨) وابن أبي الدنيا في الصمت (٩) و حسنه الألباني (صحيح الترغيب ٢٥٥٤).

The Prophet ﷺ said: «One's *iman* won't be straight until their heart is straight, and their heart won't be straight until their tongue is straight. And a man whose neighbor doesn't feel secure from his harm shall not enter Heaven.»

Reported by Ahmad (13048) and Ibn Abi al-Dunya in *al-Samt* (9). Al-Albani declared it *hasan* (*Sahih al-Targhib*, 2554).

Commentary

The path to Jannah and life improvement must pass through our hearts: there can be no true and lasting change without internal purification. What we often forget to remember, however, is that the reform of the heart relies on external choices, especially the movement of the tongue. In this *hadith*, we learn that the path to the soundness of the heart must pass through the path of reforming our tongues.

The wellness of the heart and iman

Our hearts are the key to our happiness. One of the cardinal teachings of Islam is that we cannot expect to change our lives without changing our hearts. This is the statement of the Prophet ﷺ in the *Hadith One* in this book and in this chapter as well. Whatever you and I are trying to bring into our lives or remove, all in an effort to improve it, cannot ignore the fact that this improvement hinges on what lies inside. We cannot expect the reform of the *Ummah* without people coming closer to Allah. We cannot expect the betterment of family relations (spousal, children, in-laws, and extended family) without the anchor of *iman* that grooms and edifies the heart. It is *iman* that allows you and I to put others first, be patient with their mistakes out of anticipated heavenly rewards, and to exhibit the best of manners when dealing with people. It is *iman* that teaches us the best of manners (*akhlaq*). It is *iman* that guides us to the best life-choices and protects us from destructive ones. We cannot expect to feel better about ourselves, fight depression and self-loathing, and find purpose and meaning in our lives without increasing our *iman*. If *iman* brings bliss and comfort to our lives, then we can easily understand the above *hadith* of the Prophet ﷺ as: "One's life cannot be well until their heart is well."

Allah is the source of the hearts' happiness, and the hearts' misery comes from Shaytan and worldly cravings. Therefore, the heart cannot attain happiness unless it sheds all slavery and becomes a slave to Allah alone. This heart makes Allah the Caretaker of all its needs and wants, depending on no other but He. This heart submits in worship to its Creator alone and doesn't bow to anyone else. Whatever it loses of this world doesn't perturb it as much as its losses in the Hereafter. Its highest hope is the pleasure of Allah, which is the happiness of this life and the next. And if it fails to attain it, nothing can compensate for it. This heart is at peace because it knows that the Most Wise and Merciful destines everything, and so everything that happens comes with wisdom and purpose. It knows that it is most secure when it trusts Allah who will always be by its side and never abandon it, and it is most vulnerable when it relies on itself, distant from the One who created it. This heart knows that everything in this world comes and goes, like a dream that we wake up from, and that reality is the eternal life in Heaven. This heart enjoys clarity and peace as long as Allah is its grand destination; other hearts are confused and torn by their conflicting destinations and merciless masters.

Without Allah, the heart keeps twisting and turning, looking for happiness in all the wrong places. It will seek to remove its pain through every wrong plan and path in life. However, it cannot taste true happiness until it finds Allah. As the world fails to find peace and reform until it recognizes Allah, so does the heart.

When the heart starts to change, the rest of our body will follow. The straightening of *iman* in the *hadith* refers to the probity of the body in deeds and lifestyle. This external probity, as the *hadith* affirms, is built on internal probity. The body cannot follow the straight path until the heart itself desires and follows it. Consequently, outward crookedness is a sure indicator of internal illnesses and weaknesses in the heart. The failure of our senses and body to adhere to the truth is a manifestation of the failure of the heart to adhere to it.

The tongue

Of all the external body parts, the tongue is the most important and dangerous. All the other limbs have their physical limitations in terms of the harm they can produce but the tongue doesn't. The eyes are limited to what they see around them, the ears to what they hear within a limited distance, and the hands to what they can touch, but the tongue can talk about everything under the sun. If we extend the meaning of tongue to "speech," then this would include what we write and publish online. There is no limit to what we can talk and write about, and its reach can be global. As such, the tongue is the organ responsible for many, if not most, of our sins. The Prophet ﷺ said:

> «هل يكب الناس في النار على وجوههم أو على مناخرهم إلا حصائد ألسنتهم؟»
>
> رواه الترمذي (٢٦١٦) وصححه الألباني (صحيح الترمذي ٢٦١٦).
>
> «Is there anything that throws people into Hellfire upon their faces or on their noses except the harvests of their tongues?»
>
> Reported by al-Tirmidhi (2616) and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Tirmidhi* 2616).

He ﷺ also said:

> «أكثر ما يُدْخِلُ الناسَ النارَ الفَمُ والفَرْجُ»
>
> رواه الترمذي (٢٠٠٤) وحسنه الألباني (صحيح الترمذي ٢٠٠٤).
>
> «What puts most people in Hellfire are the mouth and the private part.»
>
> Reported by al-Tirmidhi (2004) and declared *hasan* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Tirmidhi*, 2004).

And he said in response to a question:

> قلتُ (يا رسولَ اللَّهِ حدِّثْني بأمرٍ أعتصِمُ بِهِ) قالَ «قُلْ ربِّيَ اللَّهُ ثمَّ استقِم» قلتُ (يا رسولَ اللَّه ما أخوَفُ ما تخافُ عليَّ؟) فأخذَ بلسانِ نفسِهِ ثمَّ قالَ «هذا.»
>
> رواه الترمذي (٢٤١٠) وصححه الألباني (صحيح الترمذي ٢٤١٠).
>
> "O Messenger of Allah, tell me of a matter to which I may hold firmly." He said: «Say: My Rabb is Allah and then be steadfast.» I said: "O Messenger of Allah, what do you fear most for me?" He took hold of his tongue and said: «This.»

Reported by al-Tirmidhi (2410) and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Tirmidhi*, 2410).

All these *hadiths* point to the gravity of unrestrained and irresponsible speech and to how much damage it does to our faith and relationship with Allah. This is why it was common for the Prophet ﷺ to remind the Companions of the importance of safeguarding their tongue from evil speech. He ﷺ said:

> «يا عقبةُ بنَ عامرٍ صِلْ من قطعَكَ وأَعْطِ من حَرَمَكَ واعْفُ عمَّن ظلمَكَ» قال ثم أتيتُ رسولَ اللهِ صلَّى اللهُ عليهِ وسلَّمَ فقال لي «يا عقبةُ بنَ عامرٍ امْلِكْ لسانَكَ وابْكِ على خطيئتِكَ وليَسَعْكَ بيتُكَ» قال ثم لقيتُ رسولَ اللهِ صلَّى اللهُ عليهِ وسلَّمَ فقال لي «يا عقبةُ بنَ عامرٍ ألا أُعلِّمُكَ سُوَرًا ما أُنْزلتْ في التوراةِ ولا في الزبورِ ولا في الإنجيلِ ولا في الفرقانِ مثلهنَّ لا يأتينَّ عليكَ ليلةٌ إلا قرأتَهُنَّ فيها: قُلْ هُوَ اللهُ أَحَدٌ وقُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ الْفَلَقِ وَقُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ النَّاسِ»
>
> السلسلة الصحيحة (ج٦ ص٨٥٩).

> «O ‘Uqbah ibn ‘Amir, be kind to who severed relations with you, give the one who denied you, and forgive the one who wronged you.» Then I came to the Messenger ﷺ and he said to me: «O ‘Uqbah ibn ‘Amir, control your tongue, cry over your sin, and let your home contain you.» Then I met the Messenger ﷺ and he said to me: «O ‘Uqbah ibn ‘Amir, shall I not teach you *surahs* nothing like which was revealed in the Torah, Injil, Zabur, or the Quran? No night comes except that you should read them in it: *Qul huwa Allahu ahad*, *Qul a‘udhu bi Rabbi al-falaq*, and *Qul a‘udhu bi Rabbi al-nas*.»
>
> *Al-Silsilah al-Sahihah* (vol. 6, p. 859).

Controlling the tongue is one of the main foundations of piety. When virtuous, the tongue lifts us closer to Heaven. When we are unsure about the harm and benefit of what we want to say, it is always safest to be quiet. The Prophet ﷺ said:

> «إنَّكَ لَن تزالَ سالِمًا ما سكَتَّ فإذا تكلَّمتَ كُتِبَ لكَ أو عليكَ»
>
> حسنه الألباني لغيره (صحيح الترغيب ٢٨٦٦).
>
> «You will continue to be safe as long as you are quiet. But if you speak, it will be written for you or against you.»
>
> Al-Albani declared it *hasan* (*Sahih al-Targhib*, 2866).

We always have a choice whether to speak or not. The decision should be based on the merit and benefit of what we will say. If it is harmful or lacks benefit, silence would be the best and safest option. The one who adheres to this will fall under the protection of Allah. The Prophet ﷺ said:

> «من كف غضبه كف الله عنه عذابه ومن خزن لسانه ستر الله عورته ومن اعتذر إلى الله قبل الله عذره»
>
> حسنه الألباني في السلسلة الصحيحة (٢٣٦٠).
>
> Allah will hold back His punishment from one who holds back his anger, Allah will conceal the shame of one who restrains his tongue, and Allah will accept the apology of he who apologizes to Him.
>
> Al-Albani declared it *hasan* (*al-Silsilah al-Sahihah*, 2360).

The rewards in this *hadith* correspond to each good deed. The one who protects people from his anger will have Allah protecting him from His anger. The one who doesn't allow his tongue to speak ill of people and hides their mistakes will have his mistakes hidden in this life and the next. The one who retreats to Allah after a mistake and asks for forgiveness will receive the forgiveness of Allah. As can be understood from this *hadith* and others, the opposite is also true: the one who spreads people's mistakes will, sooner or later, receive a similar or wider spread of their own mistakes.

If we worry about what will happen to us on the Day of Judgment, we must take what we say and write more seriously. One sentence could make all the difference! The Prophet ﷺ said:

> «إن أحدكم ليتكلّم بالكلمةِ من رِضْوانِ الله ما يظنّ أن تبلغَ ما بلغتْ
> فيكتب اللهُ لهُ بها رِضْوانُهُ إلى يومِ يلقاهُ وإن أحدكُم ليتكلّمُ بالكلمةِ
> من سَخَط اللهِ ما يظنّ أن تبلغَ ما بلغت فيكتبُ اللهُ عليهِ بها سَخَطِهُ
> إلى يومِ يلقاه»
>
> رواه الترمذي (٢٣١٩) وصححه الألباني (صحيح الترمذي ٢٣١٩).
>
> «Indeed one of you utters a statement that is pleasing to Allah but doesn't think that it will reach the level it reaches, and because of it Allah writes for him His pleasure until he meets Him. And one of you utters a statement that angers Allah, but doesn't think that it will reach the level it reaches, and because of it Allah writes for him His anger until he meets Him.»
>
> Reported by al-Tirmidhi (2410) and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Tirmidhi*, 2410).

The heart and the tongue

The *hadith* makes it clear that the heart and tongue are intimately linked, each influencing the other. The crookedness of the heart manifests itself in the utterances of the tongue. Ibn al-Qayyim wrote:

> وإذا أردت أن تستدلّ على ما في القلب فاستدِلَّ عليه بحركة اللسان
> فإنّه يُطلِعُ ما في القلب شاء صاحبه أم أبى قال يحيي بن معاذ (القلوب

> كالقدور تغلي بما فيها وألسنتها مغارفها. فانظر الرجل حين يتكلّم فإن
> لسانه يغترف لك مما في قلبه حلو وحامض وعذب وأجاج وغير ذلك
> ويبين لك طعم قلبه اغترافُ لسانه) أي كما تطعم بلسانك طعمَ ما في
> القدر من الطعام فتدرك العلم بحقيقته كذلك تطعم ما في قلب الرجل
> من لسانه فتذوق ما في قلبه من لسانه كما تذوق ما في القدر بلسانك.
>
> الداء والدواء لابن القيم (٣٦٣-٣٦٤).
>
> If you want to know what is in the heart, seek its clue from the movement of the tongue, for it reveals what's in the heart whether one wants it or not. Yahya ibn Muadh said: "Hearts are like pots boiling with what's in them and their tongues are their spoons. So observe someone when they speak and you'll find their tongue scooping out what's in their heart of sweetness, sourness, pleasantness, bitterness, etc.; the scooping out of their tongue reveals to you the state of their heart." This means that as you taste with your tongue the flavor of the food in the pot and you realize its reality, so do you taste what's in the heart of someone from their tongue; you taste what's in his heart from his tongue as you taste what's in the pot with your tongue.
>
> *Al-Da' wa al-Dawa'* (pp. 363–364).

Whatever is concealed in the heart must and will find its way outside, and it is the tongue that lets it out first. The tongue is the first and best indicator of the state of the heart. When we love something, we talk about it and share it with others. It flows naturally on the tongue, without much effort. Those who love cars, sports, fashion, and movies talk about them whenever they have the opportunity and are excited when they do. No one instructs them to talk about these things but rather the tongue moves naturally to express what the heart cherishes. The fact that their tongues are busy with this speech is the "spoon" that reveals what is boiling in the "pot." When we are frustrated with our lives and unhappy with it, our tongues announce this unhappiness in the form of complaints, lashing out, and negative statements about our future and the value of our lives. When the heart is experiencing an *imanic* high, the tongue will express this surge of faith in remembrance and praise of Allah, kind and helpful speech, and abstention from evil and vile words. But when the heart is going through an *imanic* drought, we wouldn't mention Allah much, cussing and profanity would be the norm, and yelling and harshness would receive those around us.

All this demonstrates that the heart produces the movement of our tongues, no matter what we are saying. Therefore, if there is a flaw on the tongue, beyond the unintended mistake, the heart is the source of this flaw. Like the symptoms of a disease, the tongue reveals to us the need to give greater attention to our heart and its problems. We could use this indicator to measure the condition of our hearts and medicate them with the *imanic* treatment they need.

But the tongue plays its own role in influencing the heart. The tongue is the part of the body that most resembles the heart: both are quick in their movements and reactions. This volatility points to kinship between the two. When the tongue is careless, hasty and moves without thought, its movement changes the condition of the heart more so than any other part of the body. The tongue's movement with sin leaves a black mark on the heart. Backbiting, gossip, vulgarity, and lying come back to infect the heart and steal its *iman*. Though other parts of the body influence the heart too, none affect it as much or as quickly as the tongue. You can observe this when your heart is at peace and the tongue moves in speech that swiftly brings it discomfort and pain, or when the heart is agitated and the tongue remembers Allah and brings it serenity. Habitual speech in particular—like *dhikr* of Allah or profanity—has a strong impact on the direction of the heart. If one keeps their tongue clean, their heart will surely be the same.

This strong connection between tongue and heart shouldn't escape our attention, especially if we are seekers of heart purification. The tongue is one of the main entry points to the heart, and is one of the biggest targets of Shaytan. When we protect the tongue from sin, we keep our hearts pure. And when we want to elevate our *iman*, our tongue is one of the quickest ways to do so. The health and happiness of our heart depends on us maintaining a straight tongue, one that follows the straight path of Allah without exaggerations or deviations. We will not reach Allah without controlling our tongues.

The neighbor

The neighbor is the litmus test for the virtue of our tongues and hearts. There are a couple of reasons why this is so. First, their proximity removes any pretense we may have. It is easy to be nice to people we meet occasionally or once in a while: we can pretend to be nice without much inconvenience or burden because we get to leave soon after. But our neighbors are always there. Second, disagreements and conflicts are more likely with our neighbors over shared space and annoying behavior and violations. Proximity and conflict reveal the true character of an individual. And if we add to this mix that humans are greedy by nature, desiring all their rights but none of their responsibilities, we complete the recipe for conflict. Thus, the way we treat our neighbors reveals much about our character and *iman*.

Since injustice is very likely against neighbors, the Prophet ﷺ instructs that taking care of them is part of our *iman*. He said:

«أحسِن إلى جارِكَ تَكُن مؤمنًا»

رواه الترمذي (٢٣٠٥) وصححه الألباني (صحيح الترمذي ٢٣٠٥).

«Be good to your neighbor and you will be a believer.»

> Reported by al-Tirmidhi (2305) and graded as *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Tirmidhi*, 2305).

The neighbor is so close to us, physically and emotionally, and could be responsible for so much good in our lives that the Prophet ﷺ said:

> «ما زالَ جِبريلُ يوصيني بالجَارِ حتَّى ظنَنتُ أنَّهُ سيورِّثُهُ»
>
> رواه البخاري (٦٠١٤) ومسلم (٢٦٢٤).
>
> «Gabriel impressed upon me the kind treatment of the neighbor so much so that I thought he would soon confer upon him the right of inheritance.»
>
> Reported by al-Bukhari (6014) and Muslim (2624).

The neighbor almost became family! In fact, we see and talk to our neighbors more than we do to many of our family members. And because they are so close, their damage could be so great. This is why when the Prophet ﷺ was asked about the greatest sins, he named adultery with a neighbor's wife as the third (Bukhari, 4477 and Muslim, 86). Adultery is a major sin on its own, but it is compounded when the person is close and we owe him so much. The sin is far more serious because the betrayal is more damaging. If our neighbors are not safe from our harm, to the extent that they simply feel insecure from it, then we have failed them and have failed our *iman*. If we transgress their property rights and their right to peace and security, we reveal a character that Allah and His Prophet ﷺ hate. Instead of greed, anger, aloofness, suspicion, and irritability, we should nurture hospitality, patience, forgiveness, and generosity in all our social interactions. And we should reserve a healthy dose of this for our neighbors.

We understand from this *hadith* that the people closest to us are the ones most worthy of our care and kindness. We shouldn't reserve our best words, smiles, and attitudes to strangers and people we hardly know and forget that the truest test of our character and *iman* is how our manners are practiced every day. The people closest to us (parents, spouses, siblings, children, neighbors, and friends) deserve to be the recipients of the greatest good we can give. Since we owe them the greatest rights, the good that we do to them will also receive the greatest rewards.

HADITH THIRTY-THREE

الحديث الثالث والثلاثون

Take zina out of your heart

إنَّ فتًى شابًّا أتى النبيَّ ﷺ فقال: (يا رسولَ اللهِ ائْذَنْ لي بالزِّنا) فأَقْبَلَ القَوْمُ عليه فَزَجَروهُ وقالوا (مَهْ مَهْ) فقال «ادْنُه» فَدَنا مِنْهُ قَريبًا قال فَجَلَسَ قال «أَتُحِبُّهُ لِأُمِّكَ؟» قال (لا واللهِ جَعَلَني اللهُ فِداءَكَ) قال «ولا النَّاسُ يُحِبُّونَهُ لأُمَّهاتِهِمْ» قال «أَفَتُحِبُّهُ لِابْنَتِكَ؟» قال (لا واللهِ يا رسولَ اللهِ جعلني اللهُ فِداءَكَ) قال «ولا النَّاسُ يُحِبُّونَهُ لبناتِهم» قال «أَفَتُحِبُّهُ لأُخْتِكَ؟» قال (لا واللهِ جعلني اللهُ فِداءَكَ) قال «ولا النَّاسُ يُحِبُّونَهُ لأَخواتِهِمْ» قال «أَفَتُحِبُّهُ لِعَمَّتِكَ؟» قال (لا واللهِ جعلني اللهُ فِداءَكَ) قال «ولا النَّاسُ يُحِبُّونَهُ لِعَمَّاتِهِم» قال «أَفَتُحِبُّهُ لِخَالَتِكَ؟» قال (لا واللهِ جعلني اللهُ فِداءَكَ) قال «ولا النَّاسُ يُحِبُّونَهُ لِخالاتِهِمْ» قال فَوَضَعَ يَدَهُ عليه وقال «اللهمَّ اغْفِرْ ذَنْبَهُ وَطَهِّرْ قَلْبَهُ وحَصِّنْ فَرْجَهُ» فَلَمْ يَكُنْ بَعْدَ ذلِكَ الفَتى يَلْتَفِتُ إلى شَيْءٍ.

رواه أحمد (٢٢٢١١) والطبراني في الكبير (٧٦٧٩) وجود إسناده العراقي وصحح إسناده الهيثمي والألباني (السلسلة الصحيحة ٣٧٠) وشعيب الأرناؤوط.

A young man came to the Prophet ﷺ and said: "O Messenger of Allah, allow me to commit *zina*." The people turned to him, scolded him, and said: "Stop!" The Prophet ﷺ said: «Come closer,» so he came closer and sat down. He asked him: «Would you like this for your mother?» He said: "No, by Allah, O Messenger of Allah, may Allah make me your ransom." He said: «And people don't like it for their mothers.» He asked him: «Would you like this for your daughter?» He said: "No, by Allah, O Messenger of Allah, may Allah make me your ransom."

He said: «And people don't like it for their daughters.» He asked him: «Would you like this for your sister?» He said: "No, by Allah, may Allah make me your ransom." He said: «And people don't like it for their sisters.» He asked him: «Would you like this for your paternal aunt?» He said: "No, by Allah, may Allah make me your ransom." He said: «And people don't like it for their paternal aunts.» He asked him: «Would you like this for your maternal aunt?» He said: "No, by Allah, may Allah make me your ransom." He said: «And people don't like it for their maternal aunts.» Then he put his hand on him and said: «O Allah, forgive him his sin, purify his heart, and make him chaste.» After that, the young man never paid attention to anything of that nature."

Reported by Ahmad (22211) and al-Tabarani (7679). Al-Iraqi declared it to be a *hadith* with a good chain. Al-Haythami, al-Albani (*al-Silsilah al-Sahihah*, 370), and Shuʿayb al-Arnaʿut declared it *sahih*.

Commentary

Loving what Allah forbade comes from the weakness of heart and *iman*. This weakness deludes us into thinking that we cannot live without the *haram*. But we can escape our attraction and addiction to the unlawful when we purify our hearts. Once the heart is pure and strong, there will be no place in it for the *haram*.

The young and desire

This young man came to the Prophet ﷺ with a problem. His desire for the opposite sex conflicted with his faith and religious commitments, and he wanted a religious exception that would allow him to escape this conflict. We can glean his internal conflict from the *hadith* itself. On the one hand, he was a pious and faithful young man. His words and responses reflected his deep faith: he continuously swore by Allah and put the Prophet ﷺ ahead of his own self when he asked Allah repeatedly to make him the Prophet's ransom. He didn't rush to commit *zina* or try to justify it to himself with all sorts of excuses. He knew *zina* was a major sin and was not about to approach it despite his great desire for it. How do we know that his desire for it was great? Because he came to the Prophet ﷺ, asking for religious exemption in public. This bald move tells of the strong desire in his heart. He would not have come forward were it not for what was immensely troubling him.

The Prophet ﷺ understood well the pressures of these urges and the burden they put on young men and women. He said ﷺ:

> «يا معشرَ الشبابِ منِ استَطاع الباءَةَ فلْيتزوَّجْ فإنه أغضُّ للبصَرِ وأحصَنُ للفَرْجِ ومَن لم يستَطِعْ فعليه بالصَّومِ فإنه له وِجاءٌ»
>
> رواه البخاري (٥٠٦٦) ومسلم (١٤٠٠).

> «O young men, let those among you who are able to get married do so, for it is better at restraining the eyes and guarding the private parts. But the one who cannot should fast, for it diminishes sexual desire.»
>
> Reported by al-Bukhari (5066) and Muslim (1400).

The Prophet ﷺ prescribes in this *hadith* the medicine for the urges of the young: marriage for those who can and fasting for those who cannot. Marriage satisfies our physical and emotional needs, so one is much less likely to glance at what Allah had prohibited or launch into the despicable crime of *zina*. Those who are unable to marry and are plagued by the ubiquity of *haram* and their overwhelming desire must resort to fasting as a substitute. Fasting does two things to help: lack of food drains one of excess energy that could be used for the unlawful, and fasting brings one closer to Allah and so helps restrain the senses.

Our senses can inflame our desires, especially for young men and women whose sexual desire is at its peak. Controlling the senses and keeping them far away from the *haram* is essential if one desires righteousness and piety. Once a young woman came to ask the Prophet ﷺ

a question, and Al-Fadl ibn Abbas, the cousin of the Prophet ﷺ was sitting behind him, so the Prophet ﷺ:

> وَلَوَى عُنُقَ الفضلِ فقال العباسُ (يا رسولَ اللهِ لِمَ لَوَيْتَ عُنُقَ ابنِ عمِّك؟)
> قال «رأيتُ شابًّا وشابَّةً فلم آمَنِ الشيطانَ عليهما»
>
> رواه الترمذي (٨٨٥) وقال حسن صحيح وصححه أحمد شاكر في المسند وحسنه الألباني (صحيح الترمذي ٨٨٥).
>
> Turned away the neck of Al-Fadl. So al-Abbas said: "O Messenger of Allah, why did you turn away the neck of your cousin?" He ﷺ said: «I saw a young man and a young woman, and I feared Shaytan for them.»
>
> Reported by al-Tirmidhi (885) and declared *sahih* by Ahmad Shakir and *hasan* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Tirmidhi*, 885).

The Prophet ﷺ turned the eyes of his cousin away so that he wouldn't gaze at what could invade his heart and tempt him. This fully conforms to Allah's commands when he says:

> قُل لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا۟ مِنْ أَبْصَٰرِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا۟ فُرُوجَهُمْ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ أَزْكَىٰ لَهُمْ ۗ
> إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ خَبِيرٌۢ بِمَا يَصْنَعُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾ وَقُل لِّلْمُؤْمِنَٰتِ يَغْضُضْنَ مِنْ
> أَبْصَٰرِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ
>
> Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and protect their private parts. That is purer for them. Indeed, Allah is All-Aware of what they do. And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and protect their private parts.
>
> Al-Nur (Q24:31–32)

The rest of *ayah* (32) asks the believing women to take care of their adornment and not to expose it since it is what attracts men's attention. Unrestrained glances are arrows of temptations that pierce and bloody the hearts of men and women. They infect the heart with love for *zina* and the disease of loving the *haram*. Consequently, this heart grows weaker as *iman* leaves it little by little, and it falls victim to the onslaught of *haram*, the whispers of Shaytan, and the urges of the body.

Teaching and gentleness

One of the beautiful lessons the *hadith* teaches is the efficacy of gentleness in conveying and teaching the truth. The Prophet ﷺ didn't rebuke the young man and wasn't harsh with him. He gently asked him to sit close to him and began to ask him questions that helped him realize the error of his request. The Prophet ﷺ was patient in asking these questions one by one, allowing him the time to process the truth and reach the right conclusion when he was ready for it. He ﷺ concluded it with a comprehensive *du'a* to protect the young man and save him.

Gentleness was the dominant character of the Prophet ﷺ in all of his affairs, and he highly recommended it when he said:

> «إِنَّ الرِّفقَ لا يكونُ في شيءٍ إِلَّا زانه ولا يُنزعُ من شيءٍ إِلَّا شانه»
>
> رواه مسلم (٢٥٩٤).
>
> «Gentleness is not found in anything except that it makes it beautiful, and it is not removed from anything except that it makes it ugly.»
>
> Reported by Muslim (2594).

In the same *hadith*, 'A'isha رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهَا struggled with riding an intractable camel and hit it, and the Prophet ﷺ advised her to remain gentle. Harshness may seem necessary at times, but gentleness brings the best results, not its opposite.

There are many reasons why we resort to harsh words and acts when teaching or giving advice. Sometimes the truth is so plain to us, so clear that we cannot understand how someone else cannot see it. The strength of our convictions may breed impatience and severe reactions.

Other times it is our fear of the spread of falsehood that propels us to try to quash it as soon as we see it. At other times, it is ignorance or intransigence from others that lead to our harsh responses. What can facilitate a gentler and more generous attitude is to put ourselves in the other person's shoes. First, what is certain and clear to us is not so to others, and we must understand that certainty takes time and effort to build. If the point of contention is still mere doubts in the mind of the other, we have to be patient until they discover the truth. Second, our fear of the harm of erroneous opinions should move us to fight them in the best and most effective of ways, and the fastest way to reach a person's heart is through kindness. We should also remember to be extra patient: The ignorant need time to learn, and the intransigent need time to re-examine their certainties and their attachments to them.

Intellect and empathy

What made the Prophet ﷺ such an effective teacher, in addition to his kindness, is how he was able to speak to everyone at their own level. He shared with each what they were able to comprehend and bear, without mental or physical burden. And with this young man, the Prophet ﷺ used both intellectual and emotional approaches to reach him. He wanted him to see that what he requested contradicted the love he should have for his fellow Muslims. If he loved for them what he loved for himself, he couldn't find a woman with which to commit *zina*. Each woman is a dear relative of another person, and he should only have respect, love, and best wishes for her. Her dishonor is his, her pain is his, and her misery is his. How could a Muslim tragically inflict the pain and shame of *zina* on another family if he hates it for himself? And if we allow ourselves to hurt others like this, what stops them from doing the same to us?

The *zina* proposal doesn't work on a rational level too. A society that allows *zina* permits its own demise. *Zina* creates hostility, immorality, and the dissolution of the family. The physical desires of the young man were not and are not unique to him, and were the Prophet ﷺ to grant his request, he would have to allow all young men as well. This would introduce greater harm than the problem the young man was trying to solve. In addition, safety from harm is a reciprocal relationship: if we violate the rights of others, they'll violate our rights. Our hearts and minds tell us that we have to treat others as we would like to be treated. What we need to understand next is the danger of *zina* and the price it exacts.

The danger of zina

Allah the Most Wise warns us of *zina* in the strongest of ways when he says:

وَلَا تَقۡرَبُواْ ٱلزِّنَىٰٓۖ إِنَّهُۥ كَانَ فَٰحِشَةٗ وَسَآءَ سَبِيلٗا ٣٢

> And don't come near unlawful sexual intercourse. Indeed, it is a wickedly great sin and an evil way.
> Al-Isra' (Q17:32)

If we imagine *zina* as a dot, there will be circles surrounding it containing acts leading to it. The prohibition extends, as the *ayah* states, to anything that leads to *zina* and not just the act itself. This is so because humans have strong sexual inclinations, and if they come close to *zina*—with glances, words, touches, and being alone with the one they are attracted to—they are very likely to commit what Allah prohibited. The *ayah* also encompasses approaching *zina* physically and mentally. One approaches sin mentally by fantasizing about it, planning for it, and hoping that it would happen. This is usually the beginning of every sin: the mental rehearsal of the sin and wishing for it. If one wants to stay away from *zina*, they must keep their thoughts and fantasies clean from this sin. One approaches *zina* physically by visiting places, listening to tunes and lyrics, watching movies, and touching what promotes this desire and brings him closer to it. Another way of physically approaching *zina* is to speak and dress in ways that make us the object of attraction that draws people to this sin. This is why the Prophet ﷺ said:

«أَيُّمَا امْرَأَةٍ اسْتَعْطَرَتْ فَمَرَّتْ عَلَى قَوْمٍ لِيَجِدُوا رِيحَهَا فهي زانية وكل عين زانية»

رواه الترمذي (٢٧٨٦) وابن حبان (٤٤٢٤) وحسنه الألباني (صحيح الترمذي ٢٧٨٦).

> «Any woman who puts on perfume then passes by people so that they can smell her fragrance is an adulteress, and every eye commits adultery.»
>
> Reported by al-Tirmidhi (2786) and Ibn Hibban (4424) and al-Albani declared it *hasan* (*Sahih al-Tirmidhi*, 2786).

Since she promoted this sin by what she put on (i.e. brings it to the minds and hearts of men), she deserved the name of the one who does it. And to make sure that this presents no excuse for men, the Prophet ﷺ called every eye that unlawfully looks at her an adulterous eye. This tells us that both men and women are responsible for the piety and *iman* of each other: if they cause another to sin by what they do and wear, they are partners in that sin (see *Tuhfat al-Ahwadhi*, vol. 8, p. 58 and *Sharh Mushkil al-Athar*, vol. 11, p. 478).

In the Hereafter, the punishment of *zina* is too repulsive and severe, revealing how much Allah hates it. His punishment unmasks this sin to reveal its reality. In a vision that the Prophet ﷺ saw, he tells us:

«ثم انطلقا بي فإذا بقوم أشدَّ شيءٍ انتفاخاً وأنتنِهِ ريحاً كأن ريحَهم المراحيضُ قلتُ (من هؤلاء؟) قال (هؤلاء الزّانُون والزّواني)»

رواه ابن خزيمة وابن حبان وصححه الألباني (السلسلة الصحيحة ٣٩٥١).

> «And then they [the two angels] took me and I encountered

> the most bloated of people and they had the foulest of smells, their smell was like toilets. I said: "Who are those?" They said: "Those are the adulterers and adulteresses."»
>
> Reported by Ibn Khuzaymah and Ibn Hibban. Al-Albani declared it *sahih* (*al-Silsilah al-Sahihah*, 3951).

The people who commit *zina* and call for it may look beautiful on the outside in this world, but if their reality were to be revealed, they will look like decomposing bodies and smell like the depositories of excrement and urine. Dead bodies become bloated because they are decomposing on the inside, and the gas of decomposition causes the body to swell. Adulterers are slowly dying on the inside, filled with the bacteria of sin that is killing their souls. This punishment shows how rotten this sin is and how the people who practice it rot mentally, morally, ethically, and physically. Another punishment mentioned in the *hadith* is:

> «فانطلقنا فأتينا على مثل التنور فإذا فيه لغط وأصوات فاطلعنا فيه فإذا فيه رجال ونساء عراة وإذا هم يأتيهم لهب من أسفل منهم فإذا أتاهم ذلك اللهب ضوضوا»
>
> رواه البخاري (٧٠٤٧).

> «And we moved and came upon something like an oven, and there was noise and voices coming from it. So we looked inside it and found naked men and women, and there was fire underneath them, and whenever the fire reached them they would cry out loudly.»
>
> Reported by al-Bukhari (7047).

As they were naked in this life because of the heat of their desire, Allah lights a fire underneath their naked bodies in the next life inside an oven that they cannot escape. May Allah save us all from such a fate.

Purifying the heart

The young man's answers reflect his wholehearted agreement with the Prophet ﷺ. Even though the heart and mind can see the truth clearly, residue of attachment to sin can remain in them and can overcome them. The Prophet ﷺ therefore prayed that Allah keep this man safe from sin, externally and internally, and to forgive him his past mistakes. The blessed *du'a* of the Prophet ﷺ left this man with no inclination towards the *haram* afterwards. This is a *du'a* that we can repeat to save ourselves from *zina* or having the desire for it. And we can also repeat it for our loved ones so that Allah keeps them safe as well.

Love of *zina* and its desire is a disease of the heart. The Prophet ﷺ prayed for the heart of that young man to be pure so he would be free from desiring the *haram*. This disease develops when one practices this sin or any of its preludes. This practice creates a space for this sin in the heart (made up of all the black sinful dots), and the heart rejoices whenever more of that sin is poured into it. Yet the intoxication with this sin covers up the agony and pain that it causes, just like addiction to alcohol and drugs covers up how they are wrecking our minds, bodies, lives, and families. If one keeps feeding the *zina* addiction, their heart's corruption will only grow until they reach a stage where they love what Allah hates and hate what Allah loves. How can anyone love what in reality is disfigured like a dead body and tastes and smells like excrement! It is only our sins that stop us from seeing this truth.

The one who is free of this disease doesn't fantasize about it, doesn't come close to it, doesn't seek it, and isn't happy with it or what introduces people to it. This heart loves what Allah loves, and so it sees this sin for the great evil that it is. It isn't deceived by the crookedness of the world, where *zina* is easy and the norm while *halal* is the abnormality. This heart's sense of right and wrong transcends the normalized mistakes of its society and relies on Allah's revelation to set its moral compass.

Project

Memorize the *du‘a* in this *hadith*. Repeat it, especially when you encounter the temptations of *zina*. Use this *du‘a* to call upon Allah to keep clean the heart and body of your children and family from this sin.

HADITH THIRTY-FOUR

الحديث الرابع والثلاثون

Find joy in the halal

كان رسولُ اللهِ ﷺ جالساً في أصحابه فدخل ثم خرج وقد اغتسل فقُلْنا (يا رسولَ اللهِ قد كان شيءٌ؟) قال: «أجل مرَّتْ بي فلانةٌ فوقع في قلبي شهوةُ النساءِ فأتيتُ بعضَ أزواجي فأصبتُها فكذلك فافعلُوا فإنه من أماثلِ أعمالِكم إتيانُ الحلالِ»

رواه أحمد (١٨٠٢٨) والطبراني في الأوسط (٣٢٥١) وجود إسناده العراقي في تخريج أحاديث الإحياء (١٢٩٩) وحسن إسناده الألباني (السلسلة الصحيحة ٢٣٥) وصححه لغيره شعيب الأرناؤوط في المسند.

The Prophet ﷺ was sitting with his Companions, then he went inside his home and came out after he had bathed. So we said: "O Messenger of Allah, did something happen?" He said: «Yes. A female passed by and the desire for women fell into my heart, so I went to one of my wives and was with her. And thus, you should do, for committing the *halal* is among the best of your deeds.»

Reported by Ahmad (18028) and al-Tabarani (3251). Al-Iraqi graded it as a *hadith* with a good chain (1299), al-Albani declared it *hasan* (*al-Silsilah al-Sahihah*, 235), and Shu'ayb al-Arna'ut declared it *sahih*.

Commentary

Based on what we do with them, our desires can lead us to either Heaven or Hell. In this *hadith*, we learn how to manage our desires and redirect them to the lawful. In doing so, we maintain the health of our hearts and the soundness of our *iman*.

Desire for the opposite sex

Allah made the desire we have for the opposite sex one of the great tests of this life. Allah the Most Wise says:

> زُيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ حُبُّ ٱلشَّهَوَٰتِ مِنَ ٱلنِّسَآءِ وَٱلۡبَنِينَ وَٱلۡقَنَٰطِيرِ
> ٱلۡمُقَنطَرَةِ مِنَ ٱلذَّهَبِ وَٱلۡفِضَّةِ وَٱلۡخَيۡلِ ٱلۡمُسَوَّمَةِ
> وَٱلۡأَنۡعَٰمِ وَٱلۡحَرۡثِۗ
>
> Beautified for people is the love of what they desire of women, children, much gold and silver, fine branded horses, and cattle and tilled land.
>
> Al Imran (Q3:14)

Of all the things that Allah made desirable to us, the first that He listed is the desire for women. This conveys the depth of the attraction between the sexes, how influential it is in shaping us, and how uplifting or destructive it can be. The Prophet ﷺ emphasized this point when he said:

> «ما تَرَكتُ بَعدي فِتنَةً أضرَّ على الرجالِ منَ النساءِ»
>
> رواه البخاري (٥٠٩٦) ومسلم (٢٧٤٠).
>
> «I have not left after me a *fitnah* that is more harmful to men than women.»
>
> Reported by al-Bukhari (5096) and Muslim (2740).

This harm takes place when the woman is not pious and leads the man to sin. In addition, since men are greatly attracted to women, their desire and love for them can move them to commit *haram* for their sake (e.g. earning money from *haram* to satisfy or impress them or focusing on this world at the expense of the Hereafter to please them). Since the desire for the opposite sex is so strong and is one of our greatest tests, men and women alike should take care not to allow their behavior and interactions to tempt others. As we have seen in *Hadith Thirty Three*, the one who causes an act of disobedience is a partner in the sin.

Our notion of piety and the problem of shahwah

Reading this *hadith* may pose a challenge for some. I remember reading a question online from one who couldn't believe that the Prophet ﷺ would be attracted to another woman he caught a glance of, and this person was about to lose their faith because of it. This crisis of faith stems from our flawed notion of *taqwa* and assessment of the people who hold it.

Many of us hold an almost angelic notion of the pious, believing that they are above all human flaws and desires. And when we find out otherwise, we either dismiss their piety as pretense and hypocrisy or we allow this misunderstanding to undermine our entire faith. There are few reasons that contribute to this exaggerated notion of piety. There is the Christian influence that saw in Jesus عَلَيۡهِ ٱلسَّلَامُ a divine being who is above the human realm. Though some believed him to be fully human as well as fully divine, they couldn't accept the idea that he could have human urges, which naturally and rightfully contradict the divine nature. This gets reflected into the invention of the institution of monasticism and its denial of basic human needs and urges. The monk/priest was supposed to rise above his bodily urges and become a spiritual being devoted completely to God. Heaven was also pictured as a spiritual realm that has no place in it for the pollution of the body and its needs. Western society absorbed these ideas and still views the body as a problem. Buddhism in the East developed similar notions. The soul in Buddhism is to be liberated from the body and its attachments. The liberated and enlightened monk is one who forsakes the body: physical attachments are a sign of weakness, a mistake. Both Christian and Buddhist notions traveled far and wide and influenced how many of us define and understand piety. In addition, the depth of our sinful world and lifestyles push us to imagine piety as the complete opposite of what we see: we feel that every desire in the world is dirty since it often leads to sin, and piety is imagined as the absence of all of these desires.

Of course, this is flawed thinking. The Prophets of Allah were all human, and they had wives and children (see *Surah al-Raʿd ayah 38*). Allah sent us prophets with human urges and nature to show us how to live as humans and rise above our weaknesses. They were models of how to channel these urges in ways pleasing to Allah. The angels, with no physical desire of their own, would have failed to inspire or teach us.

The Prophet ﷺ was attracted to women, after all he was a man and had natural urges. That he would inadvertently get a glimpse of a woman and that it would make him desire women is completely natural, for this is something all men and women go through. The Prophet ﷺ shows us what to do when we have these urges and how piety is to be lived in the world, not out of it. He taught us how to live in society and still be righteous, unlike the righteousness that strips humans of their humanity and asks them to be divine, angelic, or celibate monks/priests. One of Allah's great blessings was that He sent us human prophets who understood our weaknesses and guided us to overcome them.

Seeking the halal

Allah planted several desires in us, and each of them could lead us to what Allah loves or hates. Many fall for the mirage of the haram being exciting and satisfying while the *halal* being dull and pleasureless. But Allah didn't prohibit something unless there were ampler and more gratifying *halal* choices. Shaytan tries to convince us otherwise. In another *hadith* that may be referring to the same incident:

رأى رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم امرأة فأعجبته فأتي زينب وهي تَمْعَسُ مَنيئَةً فقضى حاجته وقال «إن المرأة تقبل في صورة شيطان وتدبر في صورة شيطان فإذا رأى أحدكم امرأة فأعجبته فليأت أهله فإن ذاك

يرد ما في نفسه»
رواه مسلم (١٤٠٣).

> The Messenger ﷺ saw a woman and liked her. And so he came to his wife, Zaynab, as she was tanning leather and satisfied his need with her and said: «Indeed, a woman advances and retires in the shape of a *shaytan*, so when one of you sees a woman he likes, he should come to his wife, for that will repel what is in himself.»
>
> Reported by Muslim (1403).

This *hadith* isn't affirming that women are devils. What it is saying is that Shaytan beautifies women in the eyes of men so they would commit unlawful acts with them, and when women call to sin with their appearance and speech, they become partners of Shaytan in misguidance and evil. Shaytan does his best to glamorize immorality and make the lawful appear boring and listless. But this is all part of his deception. The Prophet ﷺ teaches us that the desires we have can be fully satisfied with what Allah permitted, and there is nothing special or extra about the *haram* except the beautification of Shaytan. This is why he ﷺ said that partaking of the *halal* will repel the attraction we have for the unlawful and satisfy our needs. The *halal* is the best antidote to the *haram*.

In his deception, Shaytan covers up the extreme harm of the prohibited acts he's pushing and makes them seem as pure joy with no bad consequences. Consider, for instance, how he and his helpers glamorize alcohol and drinking, how much money they spend on advertisement to convince people that they should be part of the drinking culture. They fail to mention, however, all the health and social harms of drinking. They fail to mention its role in causing multiple types of cancer, breaking up of families, alcoholism, rape, and domestic abuse. This is not a pretty picture or a fun and harmless drink to have! Besides, so many other *halal* and delicious drinks can bring us joy without all the drawbacks of alcohol.

When it comes to the opposite sex, we have to believe that the path of *halal* is superior, more satisfying, more lasting, more peaceful, and cleaner. *Haram* will eventually wreck our lives. The rush that comes from the *haram* is the trap of Shaytan, and once we're trapped, he'll abandon us and turn our joy to agony, misery, and sorrow.

Halal and the heart

When a desire creeps into our hearts, it can lead us to two opposing directions. We can move with this desire to the lawful and get closer to Allah, or move with it to the *haram* and get closer to Shaytan. These two options are not equal and their consequences starkly different.

When the desire for women fell into the heart of the Prophet ﷺ, he rushed to take care of it. In the *hadith*, Zaynab was in the middle of tanning leather when the Prophet ﷺ came to her. There is a valuable lesson for us here. If this desire is left unsatisfied through lawful means, it will produce great harm with time. This unmet desire will start assaulting the mind, and the wish for the *haram* and its possibility will grow. Delay allows Shaytan greater opportunity to whisper and attack our resolve, for him to convince us that the *haram* we saw is much better than the *halal* we have. If we don't seek the *halal* soon, we may collapse under the weight of these whispers and our yearnings. This helps us better understand the following *hadith* from the Prophet ﷺ:

> «إذا دعا الرَّجلُ امرأتَهُ إلى فراشِهِ فلم تأتِهِ فباتَ غضبانَ عليْها لعنتْها الملائِكةُ حتَّى تصبِحَ»
>
> رواه البخاري (٣٢٣٧) ومسلم (١٤٣٦).

> «If a man calls his wife to come to his bed but she refuses, and he spends the night angry with her, the angels curse her until

the morning.»

Reported by al-Bukhari (3237) and Muslim (1436).

This is so because of the great harm that the denial of the *halal* leads to: *haram* grows as an option. And with repeated denials, it becomes the only option.

The Prophet ﷺ described the *halal* act as one of the best worship we can do. Allah rewards for the *halal* when we do it, cognizant that it is a favor from Allah and a means to escape the *haram*. Nothing meets our needs and satisfies them like the *halal*, all without the residue of guilt or the gloominess of sin. Sin brings darkness with it, a dissatisfaction that descends with it, a tightness in the chest in its aftermath. While *haram* breeds resentment and conflict between people and couples, *halal* builds deep love. Allah blesses the *halal* with peace and contentment in the heart.

خَرَجَ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ عليهم وعليه أَثَرُ غُسْلٍ وَهُوَ طَيِّبُ النَّفْسِ فَظَنَنَّا أَنَّهُ أَلَمَّ بِأَهْلِه فَقُلْنَا (يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ نَرَاكَ طَيِّبَ النَّفْسِ) قَالَ «أَجَلْ وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ» ثُمَّ ذُكِرَ الْغِنَى فَقَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ «إِنَّهُ لَا بَأْسَ بِالْغِنَى لِمَنِ اتَّقَى وَالصِّحَّةُ لِمَنِ اتَّقَى خيرٌ مِنَ الْغِنَى وَطِيبُ النَّفْسِ مِنَ النعم»

رواه البخاري في الأدب المفرد وصححه الألباني (صحيح الأدب المفرد ٣٠١).

The Messenger ﷺ came out and it seemed like he just bathed, and he was in a good spirit, so we supposed he was intimate with his family. We said: “We see that you are in good spirit.” He said: «Yes, *alhamdulillah*.» Then affluence was mentioned so the Messenger ﷺ said: «There is nothing wrong with being rich for one who has piety, but good health for one who has piety is better than riches, and being of good spirit is a blessing.»

Reported by al-Bukhari in *al-Adab al-Mufrad* and al-Albani declared it *sahih* (*Sahih al-Adab al-Mufrad*, 301).

One of the blessings of Allah that fill the heart with happiness is for one to find the fulfillment of their needs and desires in a mate that they love in the *halal*. This love does not become sour with time, the couple do not eventually turn into enemies, and the relationship is not riddled with guilt and regrets.

While the *halal* cures the heart, and fills it with serenity and happiness, the *haram* leaves the heart diseased. Each piece of *haram* is an extra piece of darkness we import into our hearts. Our need for the *haram* is like our need for junk food: we are addicted to it, it has no nutritional value, and it slowly kills us. The joy that the *haram* brings is like the joy of junk food: it is short-lived, is followed by regret and self-loathing, and our sadness brings us back to it for more regret and self-loathing. The heart cannot find happiness while it is disobeying Allah. The world may tell us to seek happiness in illicit relationships, but Our Creator tells us that we won't find it there. No *haram* we seek can parallel the purity of the *halal* and the comfort it brings to our hearts. It is the *halal* that gives us the happiness of this life and the next. So, the next time Shaytan whispers to you about the allure of the unlawful, remind yourself of the all the pain and loss that comes with it. Then rush to the *halal* substitute and be content with it. Soon enough, Allah will make you taste the sweetness of your choice and provide you with confirmation that His promise is true, not that of Shaytan.

HADITH THIRTY-FIVE

الحديث الخامس والثلاثون

Fast for your heart

قالَ رسول الله ﷺ: «صَوْمُ شَهْرِ الصَّبْرِ وثلاثَةُ أيَّامٍ مِنْ كُلِّ شَهْرٍ يُذْهِبْنَ وَحَرَ الصَّدْرِ»

رواه أحمد (٢٠٧٣٨) والبزار (٦٨٨) وصححه الألباني (صحيح الترغيب ١٠٣٢) وشعيب الأرناؤوط.

The Messenger ﷺ said: «The fasting of the Month of Patience and three days from every month remove the contaminants of the heart.»

Reported by Ahmad (20738) and al-Bazzar (688). Al-Albani declared it *sahih* (*Sahih al-Targhib wa al-Tarhib*, 1032) as did Shu'ayb al-Arna'ut.

Commentary

The primary target of worship in Islam is the heart. It aims to educate it, enliven it, and connect it to its Creator. And the more important and foundational the worship is, the more is its impact in curing our hearts. As one of the pillars of Islamic practice and life, fasting has an undeniable impact on improving the state of our hearts and guiding them to the Most Merciful.

The month of patience

Fasting is an interesting practice. We stay away from life essentials (i.e. food and drink) to learn about the nonessentials in our lives. In the process, we understand ourselves and our Creator better.

Our desires, coupled with human weakness, mixes up the essential and nonessential until we cannot distinguish between the two. The good and the bad get mixed together as well. When we get so accustomed to them all, we find it hard to let go of what is firmly lodged into our lives. We become stuck, whether we know it or not, unable to change or escape. What we need is a stronger heart that can break free from the life we created, the trap we laid for it. Fasting comes not only to sever bonds but also to create new ones, and in the process gives us the strength to move in a different direction.

Ramadan teaches us to regulate our desires and be in control of them. These desires are one of the greatest deterrents when it comes to following Allah's guidance. Desires and temptations have a strong hold on us, and because of this weakness, we remain hostage, in fact enslaved by them. We spend much of our lives and time working to secure this or that *haram* thing, we feel delighted when we have it, and we panic when we lose it. The practice of fasting comes to liberate us from this dependence (or addiction!) and foster an *iman* that can say no to our desires and the whispers of Shaytan. Through practice and communal/social support, we learn in the month of Ramadan to say no to one of the most essential and common human activities: eating and drinking. The daily practice strengthens our ability to abstain from what we love and delay it until we find a *halal* alternative. We stop doing what we love for the sake of a greater love (Allah) and out of a greater fear (Allah's punishment in Hell). Any *haram* we face can be countered with this formula: say no to it and continue to be patient until a *halal* alternative is available.

Fasting is an act of abstinence, and in this way, it strongly overlaps with patience. To be patient is to hold back your reactions and be in control of your emotions, to persevere in doing something we dislike for the sake of a greater good we are seeking. This is what every fasting person does in Ramadan. Ramadan is an exercise in patience: it requires patience and enhances it through practice. For this reason, the Messenger ﷺ called Ramadan in the *hadith* the Month of Patience.

All types of patience are also present in Ramadan. Patience (*sabr*) can be divided into three types based on what it is connected to. The first is patience to stay away from what Allah prohibited. The second is to persevere in doing what Allah commands. And the third is to be patient with what Allah decrees and we may hate, such as death, illness, loss, and so on. Interestingly, fasting combines all three types of patience. Fasting includes patience to stay away from food and drink and all sins, patience to obey Allah's command of fasting, and patience with the consequent hunger, thirst, and fatigue.

The two impulses that move a human being to action are desire and anger. Al-Ghazali explained in *al-Ihya* (vol. 4, p. 66) that complete patience is attained when the two impulses of desire and anger are under control. When we stay away from eating, drinking, and sex during the fast, we are patient with the desires of this world. Yet the reward of the fast is not complete until we move to control the impulse of anger. The Prophet ﷺ said:

> «إذا كان يومُ صومِ أحدِكُم فلا يَرْفُثْ ولا يَصْخَبْ فإنْ سابَّه أحدٌ أو قاتَلَهُ فلْيقلْ (إنِّي امْرُؤٌ صائمٌ)»
>
> رواه البخاري (١٩٠٤) ومسلم (١١٥١).
>
> «When one of you is fasting, let them not engage in obscene speech or be loud and argumentative. And if one insults him or fights with him, let him say: "I am fasting."»
>
> Reported by al-Bukhari (1904) and Muslim (1151).

As the *hadith* explains, the fasting of the mouth from food and drink should be followed with the fasting of the mouth from sinful speech, whether it is motivated by lust or anger. In fact, this abstinence represents the true and greater aim of the fast, where leaving food and drink are only the means to it. The Prophet ﷺ said:

«من لم يدع قول الزور والعمل به فليس لله حاجة في أن يدع طعامه وشرابه»

رواه البخاري (١٩٠٣).

«The one who does not leave the saying and doing of falsehood, then Allah has no need for him to leave his food and drink.»

Reported by al-Bukhari (1903).

The one who engages in the physical act of fasting but violates its greater goals compromises his worship and loses its reward. If fasting is supposed to shield us from sin but we indulge in it, then we would have missed the intent behind its legislation.

Allah tells us in the Quran that fasting was prescribed to bring *taqwa* to our lives. Allah says:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ كُتِبَ عَلَيۡكُمُ ٱلصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ
عَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبۡلِكُمۡ لَعَلَّكُمۡ تَتَّقُونَ ١٨٣

O you who have *iman*, fasting has been prescribed for you as it
was prescribed for people before you so that you may attain *taqwa*.
Al-Baqarah (Q2:183)

Allah declares the objective of the fast clearly, and we must keep this intent alive and aim to realize it in our fast. Now, where does this *taqwa* primarily reside? The Prophet ﷺ said:

«التَّقوَى ههُنا» ويشيرُ إلى صدرِهِ ثلاثَ مرَّاتٍ.

رواه مسلم (٢٥٦٤).

«*Taqwa* is here,» and he pointed to his chest three times.

Reported by Muslim (2564).

Though *taqwa* involves the entire human being, its central residence is the heart as the *hadith* teaches. This means that the primary target of fasting is our hearts, to establish and increase their *taqwa*. All our worship of Allah, as we have discussed before, has the reform of the heart as its primary target. And fasting is no different. Unless this goal is recognized and sought, we would be missing the greatest goal for which Allah made fasting an obligation.

Three days from every month

In addition to Ramadan, the *hadith* recommends the fasting of three days from every month. The fasting of three days monthly counts as the fasting of the entire year. The Prophet ﷺ said:

> «مَن صامَ من كلِّ شهرٍ ثلاثةَ أيَّامٍ فذلِكَ صيامُ الدَّهرِ فأنزلَ اللَّهُ عزَّ وجلَّ تصديقَ ذلِكَ في كتابِهِ ﴿مَنْ جَاءَ بِالْحَسَنَةِ فَلَهُ عَشْرُ أَمْثَالِهَا﴾ اليومُ بعشرةِ أيَّامٍ»
>
> رواه الترمذي (٧٦٢) وصححه الألباني (صحيح الترمذي ٧٦٢).
>
> «The one who fasts three days from every month, then this will be the fasting of the whole year. And Allah revealed the confirmation of this in His book: ﴿The one who does good, will have ten times the reward.﴾ The day is equal to ten days.»
>
> Reported by al-Tirmidhi (762) and declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Tirmidhi*, 762).

The best of days to fast are the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth of every Islamic month as the Prophet ﷺ explained:

> «صيامُ ثلاثةِ أيامٍ من كلِّ شهرٍ صيامُ الدَّهْرِ أيامُ البِيضِ صَبِيحَةَ ثَلَاثَ عَشْرَةَ وأَرْبَعَ عَشْرَةَ وخَمْسَ عَشْرَةَ»
>
> رواه النسائي (٢٤١٩) وصححه ابن حجر وحسنه النووي والألباني (صحيح النسائي ٢٤١٩).

> «Fasting three days from every month is the fasting of the whole year—the white days: thirteen, fourteen, and fifteen.»
>
> Reported by al-Nasa'i (2419). It was declared *sahih* by Ibn Hajar, and *hasan* by al-Nawawi and al-Albani (*Sahih al-Nasa'i*, 2419).

Yet it was also the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ to fast the three days at the beginning of the month, its end, or whenever it was convenient for him during the month. The benefit and reward are attained through any three days in the month.

The Sahabah رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ understood the great favor and mercy of Allah in this multiplication of reward and taught it to others. This is what Abu Hurayrah did in the following incident:

> أنَّ أبا هريرةَ كان في سفرٍ فلما نزلوا أرسلُوا إليه وهو يُصلِّي فقال (إني صائمٌ) فلما وضعوا الطعامَ وكاد أن يفرُغوا جاء فقالوا (هَلُمَّ فكُلْ) فأكل فنظر القومُ إلى الرسولِ فقال (ما تنظرونَ؟) فقال (واللهِ لقد قال «إني صائمٌ») فقال أبو هريرةَ (صدق وإنَّ رسولَ اللهِ صلَّى اللهُ عليهِ وسلَّمَ قال «صومُ شهرِالصَّبرِ وثلاثةُ أيامٍ من كلِّ شهرٍ صومُ الدَّهرِ كلِّه» فقد صمتُ ثلاثةَ أيامٍ من أولِ الشهرِ فأنا مُفطرٌ في تخفيفِ اللهِ صائمٌ في تضعيفِ اللهِ).
>
> صحح الألباني إسناده على شرط مسلم (إرواء الغليل ج٤ ص٩٩).
>
> Abu Hurayrah was on a journey and when they set camp, they sent for him [to eat] while he was praying, and he said: "I am fasting." So when they served the food and were about done, he came and they said to him: "Come and eat," and he ate. So the people turned their heads to the messenger [they sent before,] and he said: "What are you looking at? By Allah he said: 'I am fasting.'" So Abu Hurayrah said: "He has spoken the truth. The Messenger ﷺ said: 'Fasting the Month

> of Patience and three days from every month is like fasting the whole year.’ And I have fasted three days from the beginning of this month, so I am not fasting in Allah’s lightening of the load, but I am fasting in the multiplication of reward from Allah.”
>
> Al-Albani declared its chain authentic (*Irwa’ al-Ghalil*, vol. 4, p. 99).

The great blessing of multiplication brings the benefit and reward of the fast without overburdening the seeker of purification. The *rahmah* of Allah protects from the excesses of asceticism. The following incident with the Companion Kahmas illustrates the Islamic middle path of purification and the great compassion the Prophet ﷺ had for the *Ummah*:

> قال كهمس الهلالي: (أسلمتُ فأتيتُ النبيَّ صلَّى اللهُ عليهِ وسلَّمَ فأخبرتُه بإسلامي فمكثتُ حَولًا وقد ضَمُرْتُ ونحلَ جسمي ثم أتيتُه فخفضَ فيَّ البصرَ ثم رفَعه قلتُ ((أما تعرِفُني؟)) قال «ومن أنتَ؟» قلتُ ((أنا كَهْمَسُ الهلاليُّ)) قال «فما بلغ بكَ ما أرى؟» قلتُ ((ما أفطرتُ بعدَك نهارًا ولا نمتُ ليلًا)) فقال «ومن أمرك أن تُعذِّبَ نفسَك؟ صُمْ شهرَ الصَّبرِ ومن كلِّ شهرٍ يومًا» قلتُ ((زِدْني)) قال «صُمْ شهرَ الصَّبرِ ومن كلِّ شهرٍ يومَينِ» قلتُ ((زِدْني أجدُ قُوةً)) قال «صُمْ شهرَ الصَّبرِ ومن كلِّ شهرٍ ثلاثةَ أيامٍ»).
>
> استشهد به الألباني في السلسلة الصحيحة (ج٦ ص٢٤٥).
>
> I [Kahmas] accepted Islam and came to the Messenger ﷺ and told him about my acceptance of Islam. I then stayed away for a whole year and became thin. I then came back to see him, and he looked up and down at me. I asked: “Don’t you recognize me?” He replied: «And who are you?» I answered: “I

> am Kahmas al-Hilali." He asked: «And what made you look like this?» I answered: "I did not break my fast a single day after I met you, and I did not sleep a single night." He said: «And who asked you to torment yourself? Fast the Month of Patience and a day from each month.» I said: "Give me more." He said: «Fast the Month of Patience and two days from each month.» I said: «Give me more, I am strong.» He said: «Fast the Month of Patience and three days from each month.»
>
> *Al-Silsilah al-Sahihah* by al-Albani (vol. 6, p. 245).

The benefit of moderate practice is that the purification effort can be continuous, and thus more effective and lasting. Extreme behavior is not suitable for the majority of humanity who eschew overly demanding practice and do not embrace it. And for the minority who are more religiously inclined, extremes are not sustainable: they are likely to yield unbalanced lives and personalities and be abandoned eventually. The Creator who understands human nature is the only one who can legislate the proper remedy for its ills and problems.

Fasting three days monthly creates a continuous chain throughout the year, where fasting is allowed to penetrate to the heart and treat it. But what is it treating and how?

Wahar of the chest

The *hadith* explains that the cumulative fasting of Ramadan and three days every month removes *wahar* from the chest. *Waharah* in Arabic is a small animal or lizard that firmly sticks to the ground. This image was borrowed to describe what clings to the heart, such as hypocrisy, hatred, hostility, illnesses, whispers of Shaytan, and deception. This image conveys the heart's vulnerability to corrupting influences. It also points to the stubbornness of these contaminations as they adhere to the heart and refuse to leave.

Why do these contaminations adhere so tightly? The heart is strongly attached to this world and its attractions, and this attachment brings with it competition, envy, and hostility. These illnesses weaken the heart and its resolve to follow what Allah revealed, so it accepts more of the whispers of Shaytan and develops hypocrisy and deception. Ultimately, it starts hating the truth and favoring what agrees with its wayward desires. Fasting comes to treat this at the core:

1. When we fast, we decrease the intensity of our desires by cutting down on its fuel supply: food and drink. The more satiated we are, the greater our attraction to this world and its pleasures and the lazier we are when it comes to worship. Fasting creates distance from the world, and because of this distance, divine influence has a greater chance to make an impact and flourish.
2. Fasting requires self-monitoring based on the belief that Allah is watching, and this develops our awareness of Allah's presence and His omniscience. Consequently, the bond with the Creator grows stronger and it starts to correct other wrong beliefs and behaviors. Fasting attenuates attraction to this world and strengthens the bond with the next life.
3. The cleansing and polishing power of fasting removes sinful spots from the heart and the layers of hardness that surround it. The hardness of the heart is due to our distance from Allah and our proximity to this world. When fasting moves us closer to Allah and further away from the dizzying worldly glitter, it reverses the damaging effect of sin and heedlessness.

The removal of the heart's contaminations, despite their strong adhesion to the heart, illustrates the efficacy of fasting in purification. The constant application of the medicine of fasting in Ramadan and every month that follows is important in securing and maintaining the softness of the heart. The heart consequently expands to reach the state of *inshirah* that Musa عَلَيْهِ ٱلسَّلَامُ asked for when he said: "O my Rabb expand my chest for me" [Taha: 22] and the Prophet ﷺ was given: "Did We not expand your chest for you?" [Ash-Sharh: 1]. In that state, the heart would be at ease with what Allah loves and uncomfortable with what He hates. It would finally be at peace.

The reformation of the heart through fasting ennobles the rest of the body, which starts reflecting in its behavior and choices an elevated state of spirituality. The Prophet ﷺ directed the fasting person to the comprehensive nature of the fast when he said:

> «ليس الصيامُ من الأَكلِ و الشربِ إنما الصيامُ من اللَّغوِ و الرفَثِ فإن سابَّك أحدٌ أو جهِل عليك فقل (إني صائمٌ إني صائمٌ) لا تُسابِّ و أنت صائمٌ فإن سابَّك أحدٌ فقل (إني صائمٌ) وإن كنتَ قائمًا فاجْلِسْ»
>
> رواه ابن خزيمة وابن حبان والحاكم وصححه الألباني في صحيح الترغيب (١٠٨٢).
>
> «Fasting is not abstaining from food and drink. Fasting is abstaining from idle and obscene talk. So if one insults you and speaks ill of you, say: "I am fasting, I am fasting." Do not insult anyone when you are fasting. But if someone insults you, then say: "I am fasting." And if you were standing, then sit down.»
>
> Reported by Ibn Khuzaymah, Ibn Hibban and al-Hakim. Al-Albani declared it *sahih* (*Sahih al-Targhib*, 1082).

Among all acts of worship, the greatest *tazkiyah* effect is in the obligatory acts, especially the pillars of Islamic practice. When done properly, they have the power to rescue the heart of every Muslim from Shaytan. Rather than pursue obscure and even unIslamic acts of purification, we should pay closer attention to our basic acts of worship and allow them to purify us as Allah intended them to. If you want to treat your heart, take care of your *Salah* and start fasting three days every month.

HADITH THIRTY-SIX

الحديث السادس والثلاثون

Visit the cemetery

قال رسولُ اللهِ ﷺ: «كُنْتُ نَهَيْتُكُمْ عَنْ زِيارَةِ القُبورِ ألا فَزُورُوها فَإِنَّها تُرِقُّ القَلْبَ و تُدْمِعُ العَيْنَ وتُذَكِّرُ الآخِرَةَ وَلا تَقُولُوا هُجْرًا»

رواه أحمد (١٣٤٨٧) والحاكم (١٣٩٣) وصححه الألباني (صحيح الجامع ٤٥٨٤) وشعيب الأرناؤوط.

The Prophet ﷺ said: «I forbade you to visit the graveyards, so [now] visit them, for they soften the heart and bring tears to the eye; and don't say anything wrong.»

Reported by Ahmad (13487) and al-Hakim (1393). Al-Albani graded it *sahih* (*Sahih al-Jami*', 4584), as did Shu'ayb al-Arna'ut.

Commentary

Our surroundings play a key role in the condition of our hearts. In this *hadith*, we learn that the graveyard is a location that resurrects the believer's attachment to Allah and the Hereafter. The places we frequent and what we do in them shape our hearts, so our choices have to prioritize the health of our hearts.

Remembering death

Birth, childhood, adulthood, old age, and death are the stages of life, each with its unique features and qualities. Allah speaks about these human transformations when He says:

ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَكُم مِّن ضَعْفٍ ثُمَّ جَعَلَ مِنۢ بَعْدِ ضَعْفٍ
قُوَّةً ثُمَّ جَعَلَ مِنۢ بَعْدِ قُوَّةٍ ضَعْفًا وَشَيْبَةً ۚ يَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَآءُ ۖ
وَهُوَ ٱلْعَلِيمُ ٱلْقَدِيرُ

Allah Who created you in a state of weakness, then gave you strength after weakness, then after strength gave you weakness and gray hair. He creates what He wills. And He is the All-Knowing, the All-Powerful.

Al-Rum (Q30:54)

Humans transition from a state of weakness in their infancy and childhood to a state of strength in their adulthood. In childhood, humans are physically, intellectually, and financially dependent. As they grow, they continue to acquire greater strength until they surpass their parents and caretakers. Yet this power doesn't last, and humans eventually revisit weakness with old age and concomitant dependence on others. It is an interesting cycle that takes us back to where we started, reminding us of life's impermanence.

Our strength (physical, mental, and financial) deceives us. It deludes us into thinking that life is everlasting, and many of us live as if it is. What is ironic is that our strength is flanked by two weaknesses yet we are deceived by the short-lived strength we enjoy. Power blinds us. Because we are rich, we think we'll be rich all the time. Because we are healthy, we think we'll be healthy all the time. We forget that we are holding on to transient qualities that, by their nature, cannot last. None of the things that make us feel good in this world have the power to do so for long. The great delusion is to believe that they do. What saves us from this fantasy is to recall our weakness, to take a complete look at our life and know that whatever is diverting us from Allah will soon leave us. Remembering death effectively remedies our heedlessness and flippant life style. The Prophet ﷺ said:

«أَكْثِرُوا ذِكْرَ هَاذِمِ اللَّذَّاتِ» يَعْنِي الْمَوْتَ.

رواه الترمذي (٢٣٠٧) وابن ماجه (٤٢٥٨) وصححه الألباني (صحيح الترمذي ٢٣٠٧).

«Remember often the suspender of joys,» meaning death.

Reported by al-Tirmidhi (2307) and Ibn Majah (4258). It was declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Tirmidhi*, 2307).

Our attachments to this world and hope for a long life leave us captive to our desires and the trivial; it stops us from examining the direction of our life and the consequences of our choices. But when death is remembered, the eventual and inescapable departure from this life, the mirage that is this world is lifted and we stare at the naked truth without distortion or distraction. Death reminds us that every mundane joy will come to an end, no matter what it promises and how much happiness it brings. Death drags everything in this life underground (i.e. all decays), and in doing so reveals what is important. Since the pull of this world is so strong and we are weak in front of it, the Prophet ﷺ advised us to keep remembering death so we don't lose our moral compass.

The geography of the heart

One of the great lessons of this *hadith* is that the places we visit and frequent have an effect on us. They affect our *iman*, our thought processes, and our emotions. In directing us to visit a particular location, the Prophet ﷺ also teaches us to think about where we are going and what we want from it. Certain places are conducive to piety, righteous contemplation, emotional health, and intellectual stimulation. Other places are breeding grounds for disbelief, immorality, ill-manners, rampant materialism, flawed emotions, and sophomoric thinking. The Prophet ﷺ said:

> «أحبُّ البلادِ إلى اللهِ مساجدُها وأبغضُ البلادِ إلى اللهِ أسواقُها»
> رواه مسلم (٦٧١).

> «The most believed places to Allah are the mosques and the most hated places to Allah are the markets.»
>
> Reported by Muslim (671).

Mosques are where people come to worship Allah and be close to Him. Consequently, they are the places where the angels of Allah are, where the righteous gather, and where one is edified by the best of manners, people, and teachings. In stark contrast, markets are typically the places where people head to be closer to the *dunya*. Consequently, one finds dishonest competition, cheating and lying, the inflammation of sexual desire, and the pursuit of the superficial there. This is the sad reality of shopping malls today. No wonder then that Allah hates these places where the devils gather, where He is disobeyed, where people get further away from Him, and where superficial emotions and thinking are the norm.

The one who knows that not all spots on this earth are equal in the sight of Allah will choose the ones that are most blessed, the ones that will help their *iman*. And they will avoid the places that Allah hates or, as with the marketplace, stay only as long as one has to. The same logic applies to the "places" we visit online.

The wrong visit to the grave

The benefits we receive from a place, however, depend on our spiritual readiness and vigor and on following Islamic guidelines when visiting it. Some visit the mosques while backbiting and mocking people, or they head there with closed hearts unable to reap benefits. And there are those who head to the market to sell and buy the *halal*, obeying Allah throughout and refraining from sin, and they earn Allah's rewards for this visit. It is the heart and its attachments that decide the benefits we receive. It is said: “Be in the marketplace while your heart is in the mosque, and don’t be in the mosque while your heart is in the marketplace. And it is best that you and your heart be in the mosque.”

In the same vein, the benefits and harms we receive from visiting the graveyard depend on us. In the *hadith*, the Prophet ﷺ advises us to visit the graves for the benefits we will receive. But in the beginning of the *hadith*, he informed us that he had previously disallowed such visits. This is a good example of an abrogated ruling in Islam, where something was prohibited and then later allowed or vice versa. The prohibition was likely put in place because the people were fresh off their disbelief and inclined to slide back into sin because of these visits. Though the visit can be very beneficial, and that is why the Prophet ﷺ allowed it later, the people were not ready for it in terms of the strength of their *iman* and knowledge. Thus, the harm in visiting the graves was greater than the desired benefit in early Islam, and it was disallowed.

Many of the beliefs and acts of Jahiliyyah (Pre-Islamic Ignorance) were connected to the dead. There was the worship and veneration of the dead out of belief that they have supernatural powers and connections. They were petitioned for help and assistance, and sought for blessings and guidance. And if one is safe from all of these, there is still the emotional reaction to the passing of loved ones, which includes cursing, emotional outbursts, and verbal objections to the decrees of Allah. Due to this, grave visitations are accompanied many times with religious innovations such as reciting fabricated supplications and designating special auspicious or obligatory times for these visits. The condition that the Prophet ﷺ put for allowed visits is refraining from sinful speech, which is all speech that angers Allah. Fulfilling this condition means that the visitor is in the right mindset to learn what he needs from the visit and not be harmed by it.

The right way to visit the grave

Disobeying Allah in the graveyard by worshiping other than Allah, innovated worship, or mistrusting Allah's decrees damages the heart. But when one's beliefs and practices are aligned with Islam, their visit to the cemetery can boost their *iman*. The Prophet ﷺ explained that visiting the graves softens the heart and reminds of the Hereafter to such an extent that it brings tears to the eyes. The death we witness in the graveyard tells in the most eloquent of ways the story of all life on this earth. Every human will eventually be underground no matter how long they lived or how happy they were. The grave announces the reality of this life so evidently that it leaves little space for the deceptive chatter of the *dunya*. The promise of Allah is left as the only truth when we encounter one grave after the other, all testifying that death is a must and life is but a temporary amusement.

The places we visit narrate their stories to us. If the graveyard tells one story, the marketplace tells another. Frequenting shopping malls (virtual visits count as well) throws us into the bosom of this world. You can sense the temptations of this world in them with money, fashion, food, shallowness, and never-ending consumption. Shopping malls remind us of this world and keep us tethered to it. If you want to feel the difference, visit a shopping mall and follow it immediately with a visit to a grave or vice versa. Note how your heart changes drastically. Note how your perspective and priorities will change based on the places you are in and what they are teaching you, explicitly and implicitly.

Every grave tells the story of a man or a woman who lived on this earth. They had life plans like ours, families like ours, and lived in homes like us. Most progressed in age from childhood to old age; each saw the loss of loved ones and then experienced death themselves. One story after the other in the cemetery announce that all of life is destined to end up underground, and you realize then how insignificant this world is. This experience moves us to wonder about what lies after our death. If we're going to spend more time underground than above it, what type of existence is it going to be? Our thoughts will move to the Hereafter and life in Heaven or Hell. The lies of this world are exposed, and the promise of Allah and His Words emerge as undisputed truth. This is not a truth you learn from the books but one you get to experience with your entire being. Head out to the graves and ask its people about all the money they collected and houses they built. They won't lie to you like the living do.

These visits reorient the heart and weaken the hold of this world. The heart then has no choice but to turn to its Creator and seek His pardon and forgiveness. Our eyes fill up with tears out of mercy for the dead and worry about our final destination. Contemplating the Hereafter and the end of our life brings the heart back to Allah and softens it. The grave is the beginning of our physical return to Allah, and it can help our hearts find their spiritual path back to Him.

The softeners the heart

Visiting the graveyard helps heal our hearts from their worldly addictions and the detrimental belief that we will live a long life. We cannot be close to Allah if we're only living for this world. We cannot be close to Allah if we only care about this world. We cannot be close to Allah if we live as if we will never die. Only the realization of the superficiality of this life and its inevitable end can liberate the soul from its desires and plant the love of Allah in it. A mindful visit to the cemetery accomplishes this. Other acts of worship, such as *dhikr*, increase the *iman* of the heart and edge out the *dunya* and Shaytan.

قَالَ رَجُلٌ لِلْحَسَنِ (يا أَبَا سَعِيدٍ أَشْكُو إِلَيْكَ قَسْوَةَ قَلْبِي) قَالَ (أَذِبْهُ مِنَ الذِّكْرِ).

ذم الهوى (٦٩).

> A man said to al-Hasan al-Basri: “O Abu Saʿid, I am complaining to you about the hardness of my heart!” He replied: “Melt it with *dhikr*.”
>
> *Dhamm al-Hawa* (69).

Frequent *dhikr* transports the heart from this barren world into the gardens of *iman*, where Allah is very near and the gates of Jannah are wide open. *Dhikr* renews the hope of the heart and expels the whispers of Shaytan and the hopelessness he injects into our lives. All worship can soften our hearts when we allow it to connect us to Allah.

شَكَا رَجُلٌ قسوةَ القلب إِلَى مَالِكِ بْنِ دِينَارٍ فَقَالَ (أَدِمَنَّ الصِّيَامَ فَإِنْ وَجَدْتَ قَسْوَةً فَأَطِلِ الْقِيَامَ فَإِنْ وَجَدْتَ قَسْوَةً فَأَقِلَّ الطَّعَامَ).

ذم الهوى (٦٩).

> A man complained about the hardness of his heart to Malik ibn Dinar, so he said: “Fast regularly. If you [still] find hardness, lengthen your prayer. If you [still] find hardness, then eat less.”
>
> *Dhamm al-Hawa* (69).

This advice pays attention to what one should acquire (worship) and what they should remove (too much food) to be close to Allah. Regular fasting enhances our *taqwa* and distances us from Shaytan and the *dunya*. When this treatment is unable to change our hearts on its own, we will need to add an extra dose of *Salah*. *Salah* is the conversation we have with Allah: we hear His words in the Quran we read and talk to Him with our *duʿa* and *dhikr*. If the *Salah* is long enough and dedicated enough, it won’t fail our hearts. But for this to happen, we need to remove the obstacles that stand between us and comprehension, and satiety is a major obstacle. When the stomach is full, the body is too lazy to move, and the mind is too slow to react. If you avoid the obstacles and distractions and allow *iman* to flow in through your worship, your heart will surely be transformed by the Will of Allah.

Project

Make a habit of visiting the graveyard. Whenever you feel that you heart is hardening, allow yourself the time to go and spend some time there. Think about the people buried there and their fate, and reflect on your ultimate end and the direction your life is taking. When appropriate, take your family with you and teach them the valuable lessons of the grave. Let this experience increase your *iman* in the promises of Allah and remind all of you of the Hereafter.

HADITH THIRTY-SEVEN

الحديث السابع والثلاثون

Feed the poor and care for the orphan

شَكا رَجَلٌ إلى رسولِ اللهِ ﷺ قَسْوَةَ قَلْبِهِ فقَالَ: «امْسَحْ رَأْسَ اليَتيمِ وأَطْعِم المِسْكينَ»

رواه أحمد (٧٥٧٦) والبيهقي في شعب الإيمان (١٠٥٢٣) والسنن الكبرى (٧٠٩٤) وحسنه ابن حجر في فتح الباري والألباني (صحيح الترغيب ٢٠٤٥).

A man complained to the Prophet ﷺ about the hardness of his heart, so he said: «Wipe over the head of the orphan and feed the poor.»

Reported by Ahmad (7576) and al-Bayhaqi in *Shu'ab al-Iman* (10523) and *al-Sunan al-Kubra* (7094). Ibn Hajar declared it *hasan* as did al-Albani (*Sahih al-Targhib*, 2545).

Commentary

This *hadith*, like the previous one, discusses acts that soften our hearts and inject life back into them. The previous *hadith* talked about a place to visit, and this *hadith* proposes two acts that connect us to the weak and unprivileged in society. As the places we frequent affect our hearts, so do the people we choose to be around.

The hardness of the heart

We can feel the hardness of our heart. We see it when our hearts don't move when we read the Quran or listen to it. We sense it when we remember Allah and feel nothing inside. We feel it when we visit the houses of Allah or when we attend study circles and our hearts remain closed. We notice it when we see suffering around us and feel no sympathy. We see it when our hearts don't move to help others. We notice our hearts slipping away from us as we get excited about the material but can't care less about the spiritual. We feel them dying when we lose all joy and purpose in this life. We know that there is a problem when we seek our hearts but don't find them. This is a sure sign that our hearts are suffering. Abdullah ibn Mas'ud رَضِيَٱللَّهُعَنْهُ said:

> قال ابن مسعود رضي الله عنه: (أطلب قَلْبك فِي ثَلَاثَة مَوَاطِن عِنْد
> سَماع الْقُرْآن وَفِي مجَالِس الذّكر وَفِي أَوْقَات الْخلْوَة فَإِن لم تَجدهُ فِي
> هَذِه المواطن فسل الله أَن يمن عَلَيْك بقلب فَإِنَّهُ لَا قلب لَك)
> الفوائد لابن القيم (١٤٩).
>
> Seek your heart at three times: when you listen to the Quran, in *dhikr* gatherings, and at times of solitude. If you don't find it at these times, then ask Allah to grant you a heart, for you don't have one.
>
> *Al-Fawa'id by Ibn al-Qayyim* (p. 149).

The clutter of this world disappears at these times, and the heart is closest to its Creator. When one cannot feel their heart even at the most opportune times for *iman*, then the heart must be buried under mountains of sins and drowning in a sea of desires. A heavy heart doesn't move for the sake of Allah or when it witnesses the pain of others.

The Companion in the *hadith* came to the Prophet ﷺ complaining about the stiffness of his heart. This is exactly like going to the doctor when we have an illness. This man realized the disease, cared enough to seek treatment, and understood that the Prophet ﷺ was the heart physician who could help. Their priorities and sensitivities were very different from most of us today.

Realizing the problem is the first step towards a solution. Much of humanity today, including Muslims, rush to seek treatment for their physical ailments but can't care less about their spiritual troubles. This material world is the most precious in our eyes, so we panic when we are about to lose it. But since the Hereafter resides at the bottom of our priorities, we're not worried about what undermines it. The Companions didn't live like this. Because they cared, they noticed when something was wrong with their hearts. If you care about something, you will spot if something is wrong with it. People who love their cars notice when they are dirty or have the tiniest scratch. People who worry about their appearance pay great attention to their clothes, hair, and weight. People who are worried about their hearts will notice when they are hard and unresponsive. If you are worried about your destiny in the next life, you must monitor your heart all the time. It is like keeping an eye on the fuel gauge in your car or the battery charge in your phone. This is what pushed this Companion to go and inquire. He cared enough to sense that something was wrong and to seek a solution. Our problem today is that we don't care. This needs to change.

Knowing where to go for treatment is the next step. Humanity today, including many Muslims, are clueless when it comes to the treatment of their spiritual illnesses. Many of us suffer through emotional pain, despair, depression, confusion, and envy and continue to live with it. We either don't recognize them as an illness, don't know that there is treatment, or don't know where to go to be treated. But Allah taught the believers that He has the cure, and the faithful can find it in what He revealed. The Prophet ﷺ is the doctor of the hearts, and Islam is the heart's clinic. Allah says:

وَنُنَزِّلُ مِنَ ٱلْقُرْءَانِ مَا هُوَ شِفَآءٌ وَرَحْمَةٌ لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ

And We send down of the Quran that which is healing and
mercy for the believers.
Al-Isra' (Q17:82)

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ قَدۡ جَآءَتۡكُم مَّوۡعِظَةٞ مِّن رَّبِّكُمۡ وَشِفَآءٞ لِّمَا فِي
ٱلصُّدُورِ وَهُدٗى وَرَحۡمَةٞ لِّلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ

O people, there has come to you an exhortation from your Rabb and a healing to what is in the chests and guidance and mercy to the believers.
Yunus (Q10:57)

Allah revealed the Quran and sent the Messenger ﷺ to solve all of our problems, and the heart is the central part of his mission. So, if there is something troubling you on the inside, seek its remedy with Muhammad ﷺ and in the Quran. Though other paths and other teachers may provide some relief, they are not as comprehensive, lasting, or satisfying as what the Creator provides.

The orphan and the poor

The treatment the Prophet ﷺ prescribed in this *hadith* brings us closer to the weakest in society: the orphans and the poor. The Prophet ﷺ was eager to keep their company, noting the benefits they bring to the rest of society. He ﷺ said:

«ابغوني الضعفاء فإنَّما تُرزَقونَ وتُنْصَرُونَ بضُعفائِكم»

رواه أبو داود (٢٥٩٤) واللفظ له والترمذي (١٧٠٢) بلفظ (في ضعفائكم) وصححه الألباني (صحيح أبي داود ٢٥٩٤).

«Seek the weak for me, for indeed you are only provided for and granted victory because of your weak ones.»

Reported by Abu Dawud (2594) and by al-Tirmidhi (1702) with the alternate phrase (Seek me among your weak). Al-Albani declared the *hadith sahih* (*Sahih Abi Dawud*, 2594).

The Prophet ﷺ sought the company of the weak and recommended it. Unlike many people and cultures today, the Prophet ﷺ saw the poor and weak as assets and not a burden. They bring the mercy of Allah, provisions, and victory because of their sincerity and supplication. The fact that they are afflicted brings them closer to Allah, and this is a great asset that many of the rich and powerful lack. Countries and politicians today decry and condemn the poor but not Islam and not the Muslims who follow what Allah revealed. What the weak and poor give to each society is far greater than what they take.

Proximity to the weak and disenfranchised is medicine to the hearts. They remind us of our own weaknesses and vulnerabilities. We see in them the fragility of this life and its transience. They present us with ample proof that nothing lasts, and it can be lost in a blink of an eye. Can it be trusted then? We learn from them that what we need form this life is minimal and the rest is a mirage, a fantasy that masquerades as essential. They teach us that we don't need a lot to be happy. They teach us to focus on the most important in life and to ignore the trivial, which is often the cause of our misery. They are mirrors that reflect the reality of each society, its ills and problems. They are the conscience of society.

Their company teaches humility. They are not pretentious. They model modesty and disinterest in the pomp of this world. We forget our arrogance when we're around them. We rediscover in them the suffering of humanity and what we may go through one day. We learn from them that there is nothing to rely on except Allah. All the things that inflate our ego seem meaningless. The company of the heedless rich and powerful brings the opposite: arrogance and material competition. Some have likened socializing with the arrogant to being in the company of the dead because they have dead hearts and infect ours with their disease. When we see them, we remember extravagant clothes, houses, bags, shoes, and bragging about wealth and titles; we look down at what we have at the end of the encounter. But when we see the penniless and powerless, we realize how material and superficial we are. We realize that what feeds our arrogance will eventually escape from us in this life and in the next. Is it possible or logical to be arrogant after we know this?

Proximity to the poor and orphans increases mercy and compassion in our hearts. We see human suffering, and something in us reawakens. We lend a helping hand and see the smiles on their faces, and our hearts fill up with joy. The greatest satisfaction we can receive is when we help others. Helping them gives meaning to our lives, especially when many today live without meaning. Proximity to those in need keeps us altruistic, generous, and kind. Company of the arrogant breeds selfishness and worldly obsession. Pick your companions wisely.

Acts of piety and the heart

Purifying the heart requires walking the path of righteousness. It is not simply wishing for a good heart that will grant us one but doing something about it. Acts of piety repel the diseases of the heart and their causes, and bring into our lives, feelings, beliefs, and actions that Allah loves. They bring us closer to Allah, and He blesses our hearts and protects them. They distance us from Shaytan so he will have less power over us. We can only approach Allah through what He loves. If Allah loves an act, and it is key that He should love it, we will experience its healing effect. But if we approach Allah through what He didn't sanction (e.g. innovated practices and belief or unIslamic spiritual paths), we will only stray farther away from Him.

The Prophet ﷺ recommended kindness to the poor and orphans as a remedy for the stiffness of the heart. In another *hadith*, the Prophet ﷺ said:

«أتحب أن يلين قلبك وتدرك حاجتك ارحم اليتيم وامسح رأسه وأطعمه
من طعامك يلن قلبك وتدرك حاجتك»

رواه الطبراني وحسنه الألباني (صحيح الترغيب ٢٥٤٤).

> «Would you like to soften your heart and reach your goal? Be merciful to the orphan, wipe over his head, and feed him from your food, and your heart will soften, and you will reach your goal.»
>
> Reported by al-Tabarani and al-Albani declared it *sahih* (*Sahih al-Targhib*, 2544).

When we assist others, Allah rescues us from our troubles and guides us out of confusion. This is why kindness to an orphan helps us accomplish our goals. But it is not any charitable gesture that does this. We have to feed the orphan from the type of food we eat and not a lesser one. We are close enough to wipe over his head so to know that he is not alone as we put a smile on his face. This humane gesture brings happiness to his life. For that, Allah will help us and soften our hearts.

The heart gets so stiff because of sins and attachment to this world. The problem is the distance that these two put between Allah and us. Closeness to the orphan and poor brings us back: it shatters the illusion of the world and leaves the heart anxious to return to Allah. Kindness to them increases *iman* in the heart. The kinder we are to them, the softer will our heart be.

Other deeds also have this healing affect.

رُوِيَ أَنَّ رَجُلا سَأَلَ عَائِشَةَ (مَا دَوَاءُ قَسْوَةِ الْقَلْبِ؟) فَأَمَرَتْهُ بِعِيَادَةِ الْمَرْضَى وَتَشْيِيعِ الْجَنَائِزِ وَتَوَقُّعِ الْمَوْتِ).

ذم الهوى (٦٩).

> A man once asked A'ishah رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهَا: "What is the medicine to soothe the stiffness of the heart?" So she advised him to visit the sick, walk in the funeral procession, and anticipate death.
>
> *Dhamm al-Hawa* (69).

These acts remind us of death, the unavoidable end to this life, exactly what being around the poor and weak does. The one who doesn't have the opportunity to be kind to orphans or feed the hungry will still be able to visit the sick and attend funerals. Anticipating death shifts our mental and emotional focus to the Hereafter and helps us live better lives on this earth.

At the same that we're engaged in these good reminders, we have to avoid distractions.

سُئِلَ ابْنُ الْمُبَارَكِ (مَا دَوَاءُ الْقَلْبِ؟) فَقَالَ (قِلَّةُ الْمُلاقَاةِ).

ذم الهوى (٦٩).

> Ibn al-Mubarak was asked: "What is the medicine of the heart?" He answered: "Not meeting people often."
>
> *Dhamm al-Hawa* (69).

Though socialization is an important human activity, too much can distract and be harmful. Spending alot of time with people (physically and online) means that we have no or very little time with Allah. And if the company is bad, we move further away from Him. The following saying lists what we ought to do in order to fix our hearts:

سَمِعْتُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ الْخَاص يَقُولُ (دَوَاءُ الْقَلْبِ خَمْسَةُ أَشْيَاءٍ: قِرَاءَةُ الْقُرْآنِ بِالتَّدَبُرِ وَخَلاءُ الْبَطْنِ وَقِيَامُ اللَّيْلِ وَالتَّضَرُّعُ عِنْدَ السَّحَرِ وَمُجَالَسَةُ الصَّالِحِينَ).

ذم الهوي (٧٠).

> Ibrahim al-Khass said: "The medicines of the heart are five: reading the Quran with contemplation, the emptiness of the stomach, night prayer, supplication at the end of the night, and keeping the company of the pious."
>
> *Dhamm al-Hawa* (70).

This saying identifies satiety and bad company as the obstacles to the health of the heart. The revivers of the heart are pondering over the Quran, night prayer, *du'a* late at night when we are alone with Allah, and the company of the righteous. For us to be healthy, we have to take our medicine and avoid the causes of the disease. It is only then that our hearts will rejoice and prosper.

Project

Plan to take a trip to visit the sick or attend a funeral. Try to get involved in helping the poor, feeding them, assisting them, and taking care of children in need. Surround yourself with charitable work and note how it will change your heart and your life. Make one or more of these activities a staple part of your life.

HADITH THIRTY-EIGHT

الحديث الثامن والثلاثون

Avoid excessive laughter

قالَ رسول اللهِ ﷺ: «مَنْ يَأْخُذُ عَنِّي هؤُلاءِ الكَلِماتِ فَيَعْمَلُ بِهِنَّ أَوْ يُعَلِّمُ مَنْ يعمَلُ بِهِنَّ» فقالَ أبو هريرةَ (قلتُ أنا يا رسولُ اللهِ فأخَذَ بيدِي فَعَدَّ خمْسًا وقال: «اتَّقِ المَحارِمَ تَكُنْ أَعْبَدَ النَّاسِ وارْضَ بما قَسَمَ اللهُ لَكَ تكُنْ أَغْنَى النَّاسِ وأحْسِنْ إلى جارِكَ تكُنْ مُؤمِنًا وأَحِبَّ للنَّاسِ ما تُحِبُّ لِنفْسِكَ تَكُنْ مُسلِمًا وَلَا تُكْثِرِ الضَّحِكَ فإِنَّ كَثْرَةَ الضَّحِكِ تُمِيتُ القَلْبَ»).

رواه الترمذي (٢٣٠٥) وابن ماجه (٤٢١٧) وحسنه ابن حجر والألباني (السلسلة الصحيحة ٩٣٠).

The Prophet ﷺ said: «Who will take these statements from me to apply them or teach them to one who will apply them?» Abu Hurayrah said, "I shall, O Messenger of Allah." So he took my hand and enumerated five and said: «Avoid the unlawful and you will be the best worshiper among people. Be satisfied with what Allah allotted for you and you will be the richest of people. Be kind to your neighbor and you will be a believer. Love for the people what you love for yourself and you will be a Muslim. And do not laugh too much, for indeed excessive laughter kills the heart.»

Reported by al-Tirmidhi (2305) and Ibn Majah (4217). Ibn Hajar declared it *hasan* as did al-Albani (*al-Silsilah al-Sahihah*, 930).

Commentary

There are acts and places that soften the heart, and there ones that kill it. The spiritual seeker must pay attention to what can help him reach Allah and what may delay or obstruct his journey. This *hadith* warns us that excessive laughter is detrimental to our hearts and *iman*.

Learning and teaching

The Prophet ﷺ prefaced the *hadith* with a question to captivate the attention of the listener, pique their curiosity, and set up the right mindset for receiving new information. The Prophet ﷺ was emphasizing that the goal of knowledge is its application; but if one fails to follow, at least they shouldn't fail to teach.

The Prophet ﷺ was willing to teach this *hadith* only on the condition that one would hear it to practice it, and we should approach it and all learning with the same spirit. The knowledge we put into practice is the one we really possess, the truly beneficial knowledge (see *Hadith Twenty-Four*). All other knowledge will be a testament against us when we meet Allah: that we knew better but chose not to follow.

> قال أبو الدرداء رضي الله عنه: (إنما اخشى على نفسي ان يقال لي على رؤوس الخلائق ((يا عويمر هل علمت؟)) فاقول ((نعم)) فيقال ((ماذا عملت فيما علمت؟)))
>
> صفة الصفوة (ج١ ص٢٤١).
>
> Abu al-Darda' رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُ said: "What I fear for myself is that I would be asked in front of all creation: 'O Uwaymir, did you know?' So I will say: 'Yes.' So I will be asked: 'What did you do with what you knew?'"
>
> *Sifat al-Safwah* (vol. 1, p. 241).

Knowledge must have a goal. We shouldn't approach learning with the intention of depositing more information in our brains. The goal of knowledge in Islam is to transform lives and lead to Allah. If we fail to use it for this end, we would be like the one who bought a car never to drive it or a chair never to sit on it. Knowledge is there to affect our lives and behaviors. If it doesn't, we end up losing it and forgetting it.

> قال سفيان الثوري: (يهتف العلم بالعمل فإن أجابه وإلا ارتحل)
>
> حياة السلف بين القول والعمل (ص٩٠).
>
> Sufyan al-Thawri said: "Knowledge calls for action. If it doesn't answer it, it leaves."
>
> *Hayat al-Salaf Bayna al-Qawl wa al-ʿAmal* (p. 90).

If we fail to live by what we learn, we must at least not fail in transmitting it. We've seen in *Hadith Thirty-One* that one may convey knowledge to another with deeper understanding. Knowledge is there to be realized. If there is something stopping us from realizing the benefit of our knowledge, we can still see it in others when we share what we know with them. If they know what we know, they could change their lives and the lives of others with it.

Avoiding the unlawful

When we think of worship, we usually think of acts like fasting, prayers, and charity. We seldom think of abstaining from what Allah hates as worship. Yet the *hadith* teaches that our worship is not complete until we stay away from the *haram*. In fact, leaving the *haram* helps us climb to the highest levels of *iman* and *taqwa*.

You may find many of us eager to perform what Allah commanded, and being regular in our prayers and acts of devotion. But you may also find us lax when it comes to Allah's prohibitions, crossing the legal borders without much thought. We may pray but cheat when we buy and sell, donate but be arrogant, engage in *dhikr* but listen to and say what

Allah hates (gossip, backbiting, and vulgarity). When these infractions go unnoticed and become a part of our life, they destroy our hearts and *iman*. It is like one who spends part of his day building something, only to bring it down the rest of the day, canceling most of the good work that he had done.

Committing the *haram* without guilt is a sign of a flawed conception and practice of *taqwa*. If we obey Allah because we love and fear Him, the same motivation ought to spur us to stay clear of what Allah hates. But what happens is that we reduce worship in our minds and cultures to certain acts while ignoring others. So worship would be *Salah* but not kindness to others or kindness to others but not *Salah*, depending on our personal and prejudiced definition of *taqwa*. This definition oftentimes represents what we're comfortable with or grew up with, so what we like or are used to finds its way into our circle of worship while the rest is excluded. This, of course, is the not the Islamic definition of worship but a partial one—partial in terms of bias and incompleteness—that we invented. The full definition of worship is all that Allah loves, each according to the station and importance that Allah assigns to it: all that Allah loves is important, but some are more important than others.

When avoiding prohibitions isn't included in our understanding of worship, we fail to notice their polluting influence on our hearts: the worship that we do loses its power to change and elevate when it's mixed with sin. This is why only performing the obligations and staying clear of the *haram* is better than performing many voluntary acts on top of the obligations but habitually crossing into the *haram*. The first person keeps his heart clean and this allows his worship to bring him closer to Allah. As for the second, the good that he does is canceled by the sins he earns, and his heart loses its purity and *iman*.

قال عمر بن عبد العزيز: (ليس التقى بمن يقوم الليل ويصوم النهار ثم

يخلط فيما بين ذلك إنما المتقي من يؤدي الفرائض ويجتنب المحارم فإن فعل بعد ذلك خيرا فهو خير إلى خير)

> Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz said: "The pious is not the one who prays at night and fasts during the day but sins in between. The pious is the one who performs the obligations and avoids the prohibitions, and if he does more good after that, then it is good added to good."

Avoiding sin demonstrates how much we love Allah. Struggling against our desires and the temptations of the world, especially when we are alone, and emerging victorious testifies to the strength of our *iman*. Our test in this world is in doing what we hate and in leaving what we love, and avoiding sin demonstrates this.

قال سهل: (إن أكثر بني آدم قد يفعل بعض المأمور به ولا يترك المنهي عنه إلا الصديقون)

مجموع الفتاوى لابن تيمية (ج٢٠ ص١٣٦).

> Sahal said: "Most of the children of Adam may do some of the obligations but only the *siddiqun* leave the prohibitions."
>
> *Majmu' al-Fatawa* (vol. 20, p. 136)

Only those who truly love Allah and fear Him leave the *haram*.

Being pleased with Allah

We imagine the richest person to be the happiest, the most satisfied because of what he has. This is why all of us seek wealth, because we believe it will bring us this happiness. But what do we do when we have all that we wanted and yet find happiness to be elusive? How do we interpret the sadness and anxiety of the rich?

Humans always crave more, never satisfied with what they have.

Though this is an asset when it comes to the pursuit of the Hereafter and solving problems on this earth, it is a definite liability when it moves us to chase after this world. Because of this quality, those who crave this world never achieve happiness or satisfaction in their life. In fact, since they are chasing after a world that is always running away from them, this quality guarantees human misery and discontent. This is the circle of misery: constant dissatisfaction leads to more acquisitions, and new acquisitions increase the dissatisfaction, and so on.

The Prophet ﷺ taught us how to escape from this circle of misery and how to tread the path of true happiness. When we focus on what we have and are grateful to Allah for it, we will appreciate it and won't look down on it. If we ponder its loss, we will realize its true value in our lives. Consequently, this constant dissatisfaction will end. And if it ends, we would have achieved what the richest men and women on this world haven't been able to. The contented, no matter how little they have, are happy with what Allah gives them: they know that this is an allotment from the Most Wise, and nothing else is better than Allah's selection. They will redirect their desire and focus to the Hereafter because whatever is gained from this life is destined to perish. So rather than crave the transient and be upset over it, it is better to desire the permanent and be blessed forever in it.

The one who is contented with what Allah gives him has overcome his greed and this makes him the richest person on earth. Without greed, he walks this earth calm and honorable as no wealthy man can. The rich who are subservient to their greed walk this earth humiliated and anxious, even if their exterior hides it.

Kindness and love

Loving for people what you love for yourself is a feature of Islam. "People," as al-San'ani explains in *al-Tanwir Sharh al-Jami' al-Saghir* (vol. 1, p. 318), may refer to other Muslims or to humanity at large. A Muslim loves that Allah guides all, blesses all, and for all to be in Jannah. There is no hatred or ill-will in the heart of the Muslim. This leaves the Muslim with a serene heart. This heart doesn't wish misery and pain for others, and isn't waiting for the worst to happen out of envy or the desire for revenge. These ill-feelings bring agony to the heart, while wishing the best for others cures the heart of its pain and allows it to flourish. The one waiting for the worst and who is only happy when others are in pain is trapped by these sentiments. He suffers when these bad wishes don't come true, compounding his frustrations, and if they do happen, he is not any better because of it. But wishing for the best lets go of our anger, and we will be better off because of it.

Wishing for the best is the start, and it is an important start. But when one moves beyond wishes and into kind acts, then one would have climbed to the station of *iman*. Kindness is the realization of these noble wishes, a personal move to make what we want for others a reality. And the people who deserve our utmost kindness are the ones closest to us: our neighbors (see *Hadith Thirty-Two*). This move from wish to action parallels the move from knowledge to action in the beginning of the *hadith*, emphasizing again that we are tasked with changing the world around us and not simply reacting to it or passively observing it.

Laughter and the heart

Laughter is a natural human reaction to what amuses us, and it is not what the *hadith* is warning against. The *hadith* is warning against excessive laughter. Excessive laughter is a reflection of *ghaflah*: heedlessness and negligence, a product of a heart that is consumed by this world and its attractions. The heart that is only interested in laughter and fun is empty of Allah and the Hereafter; it has no desire to focus on any serious matter. Its frequent laughs demonstrate how frivolous it has become and how great is its distance from Allah. The heart that only craves laughter and comedy can only focus on the silly and trivial. This heart lacks the concentration and gravity to think about Allah and the next life, and will attempt to escape into comical alternatives as soon as it can.

Contrast this to the character and qualities that the Quran builds. The reader of the Quran is calm, serious, and focused. The Quran teaches him to fear and honor Allah, to worry about his mistakes and what will happen to him after his death. These are no laughing matters. This person contemplates the most important issues in the Quran and finds solutions to the world's problems in it. The Quran teaches him dedication, to take his life seriously and to work diligently towards the pleasure of Allah. It teaches him to contemplate the universe around him and be sensitive to people's suffering, and not to mock for cheap laughs. A heart that is only comfortable with the comical cannot handle the Quran and will flee from it.

One of the challenges of our world today is that we've gotten used to the silly and trivial and cannot be bothered with anything else. We want our news and education to be funny even if it sacrifices depth and breadth. Our attention span has shrunk significantly unless if what we're watching and listening to is comedic. Humor became the medium of choice even in *da'wah* and Islamic education, not realizing how the medium changes, dilutes, and corrupts the message. We've even seen "Islamic" stand-up comedy that seems to be unaware that too much laughter is a problem.

All this doesn't mean that Muslims have to be glum and gloomy. The Prophet ﷺ used to smile often, which reflected his good nature, peace of mind, *iman*, and kindness.

قال جرير بن عبدالله رضي الله عنه: (ولا رَآني إلا تبَسَّم في وَجهي)
رواه البخاري (٣٠٣٥) ومسلم (٢٤٧٥).

> Jarir ibn Abdullah رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُ said: "Whenever he [the Prophet ﷺ] saw me, he would smile in my face."

Reported by al-Bukhari (3035) and Muslim (2475).

Muslims who are close to Allah shouldn't let harshness, melancholy, and irritability be the product of their *iman*. The Prophet ﷺ reached the pinnacle of *iman* and yet he didn't adopt this character and behavior. The Companions used to laugh from time to time but were serious when need be. They didn't make comedy the central theme of their lives or their constant pastime, and they worshiped Allah frequently to maintain the health of the hearts. Balance is the key. Sadness is not an Islamic goal, but excessive laughter is a problem too. And given the status of what passes for humor today, too much of it definitely leads to what Allah hates. If too much laughter kills the heart, it will be unresponsive to Allah's revelation. How can a dead heart hear or see the truth? It doesn't even care about it.

HADITH THIRTY-NINE

الحديث التاسع والثلاثون

Get closer to virtuous people and places

قالَ رسول اللهِ ﷺ: «سَبْعَةٌ يُظِلُّهُمُ اللهُ في ظِلِّهِ يَوْمَ لا ظِلَّ إلا ظِلُّهُ الإمامُ العادِلُ وشابٌّ نَشَأَ بِعِبادَةِ اللهِ ورَجُلٌ قَلْبُهُ مُعَلَّقٌ في المَساجِدِ ورَجُلانِ تَحابّا في اللهِ اجْتَمَعا عَلَيْهِ وتَفَرَّقا عَلَيْهِ ورَجُلٌ دَعَتْهُ امْرَأَةٌ ذاتُ مَنْصِبٍ وجَمالٍ فقالَ (إنِّي أَخافُ اللهَ) ورَجُلٌ تَصَدَّقَ بِصَدَقَةٍ فَأَخْفاها حَتَّى لا تَعْلَمَ شِمالُهُ ما تُنْفِقُ يَمينُهُ ورَجُلٌ ذَكَرَ اللهَ خالِيًا فَفاضَتْ عَيْناهُ»

وفي روايةٍ لمسلم «ورجلٌ مُعَلَّقٌ بالمسجدِ إذا خَرَجَ مِنْهُ حَتَّى يَعودَ إِلَيْهِ». رواه البخاري (٦٦٠) ومسلم (١٠٣١).

The Prophet ﷺ said: «Seven people will be shaded by Allah under His shade on the day when there will be no shade except His: the just ruler, a young man who grew up worshiping Allah, a man whose heart was attached to mosques, two men who loved each other for Allah's sake and they met and parted because of it, a man who was called by a beautiful woman with nobility [for *zina*] but he said: "I fear Allah," a man who gave charity and hid it so that his left hand did not know what his right hand had given, and a man who remembered Allah in seclusion and his eyes get flooded with tears.»

And in another narration in Muslim: «...and a man who was attached to the mosque from the time he left it until he came back to it.» Reported by al-Bukhari (660) and Muslim (1031).

Commentary

To be under the shade on the Last Day is a sign of Allah's mercy and protection. Receiving it through these various acts requires a strong heart that overcomes temptations. Building up this strength needs sincerity, love, and the obedience of Allah. This is how the heart triumphs against the temptations of this world.

Shade on the Day of Judgment

The Day of Judgment will be an incredibly hot day. The sun will be so close on that day that people will be swimming in their sweat. The Prophet ﷺ said:

«تُدْنَى الشَّمْسُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ مِنَ الْخَلْقِ حَتَّى تَكُونَ مِنْهُمْ كَمِقْدَارِ مِيلٍ
فَيَكُونُ النَّاسُ عَلَى قَدْرِ أَعْمَالِهِمْ فِي الْعَرَقِ»

رواه مسلم (٢٨٦٤).

«The sun will be brought closer to creation on the Day of Resurrection until it will be the distance of a *mil* from them, and people will sweat according to their deeds.»

Reported by Muslim (2864).

This *mil* distance, as the narrator explains in *Sahih Muslim*, could refer to the length of a kohl stick or a physical distance. In either case, it is very close. If we complain about the heat in the summer while the sun is so far, what would we do then? In addition to its proximity, the heat of the sun will also be multiplied, and each will suffer its heat according to their sins. The Prophet ﷺ said:

«تَدْنُو الشَّمْسُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ عَلَى قَدْرِ مِيلٍ وَيُزَادُ فِي حَرِّهَا كَذَا وَكَذَا يَغْلِي
مِنْهَا الْهَامُّ كَمَا تَغْلِي الْقُدُورُ يَعْرَقُونَ فِيهَا عَلَى قَدْرِ خَطَايَاهُمْ مِنْهُمْ مَنْ
يَبْلُغُ إِلَى كَعْبَيْهِ وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ يَبْلُغُ إِلَى سَاقَيْهِ وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ يَبْلُغُ إِلَى وَسَطِهِ

وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ يُلْجِمُهُ الْعَرَقُ»

رواه أحمد (٢٢١٨٦) وقال محققو المسند إسناده قوي.

> «The Sun will come near on the Day of Resurrection the distance of a *mil*, and its heat will increase to such an extent that the heads will boil from it as pots do. People will sweat on that day according to their sins, so the sweat will reach the ankles of some, the legs of some, the waists of some, and the mouths of some.»
>
> Reported by Ahmad (22186) with a strong chain.

The only relief from this terrible heat will be the shade that Allah provides. This is the shade of Allah's Throne, as another *hadith* explains:

«المُتَحابُّونَ في اللهِ في ظِلِّ العرشِ يومَ لا ظِلَّ إلَّا ظِلُّهُ»

رواه ابن حبان (٥٧٧) وصححه الألباني (صحيح الترغيب ٣٠١٩).

> Those who love each other for the sake of Allah will be under the shade of the Throne, on a day when there will be no shade except its shade.
>
> Reported by Ibn Hibban (577) and al-Albani declared it *sahih* (*Sahih al-Targhib*, 3019).

The people who will be comforted under the shade are those who put Allah before their own comfort and desires. They fought the whispers of Shaytan and personal weakness, and their society's pressures at times, for the sake of the Hereafter and triumphed. Each one of the seven in the *hadith* exemplifies devotion to Allah that stands against what the self is attracted to: power, lust, money, selfishness, arrogance, and praise and recognition. In order to be close to Allah, they sacrifice what they love and cling to what Allah loves even if it is hard. For all of their discomfort and sacrifice, Allah removes their great discomfort of the Last Day and honors them with His shade.

The heart and the mosque

Many places capture our hearts on this earth. We fondly remember our parents' home and the places where we grew up. Our hometown retains top spot in our heart, no matter where we go later in life. We may favor big cities or small towns, the modern or the quaint, all based on our interests, personality, and experience. These places give us most comfort and joy, where our heart finds happiness and peace.

Allah, the Most Wise, loves certain areas on this earth more than others (see *Hadith Thirty-Five*). Among all the places on this earth, the mosque is the one that Allah loves the most. It is the house of Allah, where He is worshiped, remembered, and where *taqwa* lives and thrives. It is the place that brings us closest to Allah, the place that belongs to the Hereafter, whereas much of what is outside belongs to this world. Those who love Allah and seek to be close to Him cannot find a better place than the houses of Allah. It is there that they congregate, and it is there where Allah blesses them.

فِي بُيُوتٍ أَذِنَ ٱللَّهُ أَن تُرۡفَعَ وَيُذۡكَرَ فِيهَا ٱسۡمُهُۥ يُسَبِّحُ
لَهُۥ فِيهَا بِٱلۡغُدُوِّ وَٱلۡأٓصَالِ ٣٦ رِجَالٞ لَّا تُلۡهِيهِمۡ تِجَٰرَةٞ وَلَا بَيۡعٌ
عَن ذِكۡرِ ٱللَّهِ وَإِقَامِ ٱلصَّلَوٰةِ وَإِيتَآءِ ٱلزَّكَوٰةِ يَخَافُونَ يَوۡمٗا
تَتَقَلَّبُ فِيهِ ٱلۡقُلُوبُ وَٱلۡأَبۡصَٰرُ ٣٧ لِيَجۡزِيَهُمُ ٱللَّهُ أَحۡسَنَ
مَا عَمِلُواْ وَيَزِيدَهُم مِّن فَضۡلِهِۦۗ وَٱللَّهُ يَرۡزُقُ مَن يَشَآءُ
بِغَيۡرِ حِسَابٖ ٣٨

> In houses which Allah has ordered to be raised and that His name be mentioned in them. Exalting Him within them in the morning and the evenings are men whom neither commerce nor sale distract from the remembrance of Allah, performance of prayer, and giving of Zakah. They fear a Day in which the hearts and eyes will turn about so that Allah may reward them according to the best of what

> they did and increase them from His bounty. And Allah gives provision to whom He wills without account.
>
> Al-Nur (Q24:36–38)

The main *hadith* of this chapter describes a strong love for mosques. This person loves the masjid so much so that he cannot wait to come back to it when he leaves. The phrase in Arabic indicates that his heart is hanging in the masjid as one would hang a lamp or fixtures like lights and fans. In other words, his heart is a fixture of the masjid and belongs to it. Though he may leave the mosque physically, his heart doesn't: it stays in the masjid though he's not in it. This is why he cannot wait to come back because he leaves his heart there. This strong love is bred by his love for Allah. His heart does not long for the world and is not its prisoner. His focus and concern is the Hereafter, and he rushes back to what he loves as soon as he is done with whatever else the world needs from him. He finds his peace and joy in being close to Allah, nothing else and no other place can give the same feeling. When he steps out of the mosque, it would be like leaving his hometown and becoming a stranger in a strange land. His family, his memories, and his heart are right back in the masjid. It is there where he gets close to Allah every single day, so why wouldn't he miss it when he leaves it? It is there where he feels Allah's love.

«ما توطَّنَ رجلٌ مسلمٌ المساجدَ للصَّلاةِ والذِّكرِ إلَّا تبشبشَ اللَّهُ لَهُ كما يتبشبشُ أَهلُ الغائبِ بغائبِهم إذا قدمَ عليهم»

رواه ابن ماجه وصححه الألباني (صحيح ابن ماجه ٦٥٩).

> «A man does not regularly stay in the mosques to perform prayer and remember Allah but Allah feels happy with him just as the family of one who is absent feels happy when he comes back to them.»
>
> Reported by Ibn Majah and al-Albani declared it *sahih* (*Sahih ibn Majah*,

659).

There are those among us whose hearts are hanging in malls, stock markets, sport rings/arenas, and are constantly thinking about movies, music, celebrities, fame, friends, and social media. Their hearts are there because that is what they love, and they cannot wait to come back to it when they leave it. We may be in the masjid physically, but are we there spiritually and emotionally? One of the main obstacles between us and the benefits of the mosque and the Quran is that our hearts are not present. We come to them in form but are so far from them in spirit.

The *hadith* teaches that there are places that help our hearts and nurture *iman* in them. When you spend time there, you experience the mercy of Allah and His blessings. You will feel better the more time you spend there, on the condition that you open your heart to Allah, believe in His words, and give your heart the time to soften and be elevated. There are also places that undermine our faith and promote doubt, confusion, lust, superficial thinking, and tightness in the chest. One of the important conditions of reforming the heart is to watch out for its surroundings and where it spends time and how.

We love many places on the face of this earth, and there is nothing wrong with that as long as there is nothing in them that angers Allah. This love is typically motivated by the self and its desires. But we should aspire to love the things, places, and people that Allah loves, which is a higher expression and experience of love. This love will come naturally to us if we love Allah or we may need to put in some effort first until we achieve it. In either case, it is possible to reach. And when we love what Allah loves, He will love us and guide us. When we love what Allah loves, we put ourselves closest to Him.

قَالَ سَعِيد بن المُسَيّب: (من جلس فِي المسجد فإنما يجالس ربه عز وجل)

فتح الباري لابن رجب (ج٦ ص٤٨).

> Sa‘id ibn al-Musayyab said: «The one who is sitting in the mosque is sitting with Allah.»
>
> *Fath al-Bari* by Ibn Rajab (vol. 6, p. 48).

Is there anything more sublime than being with Allah? Our goal should be to find what Allah loves and stay as close to it as possible. Our love for Allah will have us love His house more than we love ours, and honor His house more than we honor ours.

The just ruler

The Prophet ﷺ begins in the *hadith* with the just leader because of the great benefits he brings to society, the severity of his test, and his excellence in the sight of Allah. Justice is the foundation of a prosperous society. Justice secures the people's needs and protects them from harm. It gives each person their rights and saves them from transgression. Peace and contentment spread under the reign of this ruler, and Islamic practice flourishes. People would not have to fight over this world because their rights are secure, and this improves their character and religious observance. This just ruler has the power to oppress and be corrupt, in fact to commit any sin he desires, but he doesn't. He resists the temptations of power and wealth because of his fear of Allah. He puts the love of Allah before the love of the *dunya*.

The just ruler in the *hadith* refers to the supreme political authority of the land and anyone who has authority over Muslims. The Prophet ﷺ says about those who are just with their families:

«إن المقسطين عند الله على منابرَ من نور عن يمين الرحمن الذي يعدلون في حكمهم وأهلهم وما وَلُّوا»

رواه مسلم (١٨٢٧).

> «The just are with Allah on pulpits of light to the right of al-Rahman—they are those who are just in their rulings, with their families, and whom they have authority over.»
>
> Reported by Muslim (1827).

Even if we believe that this justice is missing around us, our goal should be to live this justice and apply it wherever possible. We should become the agents of justice, those who create it and spread it in our societies. We should be just with the family that Allah had put under our care. We should be just with our employees and workers. We should be just with anyone we meet. When we spread enough of this justice, our entire society would finally be able to achieve the justice it is dreaming of.

The pious youth and temptations

Adolescence is a critical time in our lives. It is the time when we transition from childhood and begin to experience the emotional and physical traits of our adult life. It is also the time when we may be most foolish: our physical abilities are not always countered by mental maturity, the wisdom of experience, or the edification of learning. We are also least likely then to worry about the Hereafter because our good health at that age suggests that we have a long life ahead of us. For one to be devout at a young age, despite all the odds, they must truly love Allah and fear Him. This is why it is important that we as parents, or future parents, try to create this pious environment for our children. If they grow up right, it is more likely that they will stay on this path as they get older.

Another who stood firmly against strong temptations was the one who said no to *zina*. All the reasons for him to commit this act were there. First, he was not the one who was pursuing it but was the one being pursued. Second, the woman was beautiful and desirable, and she was powerful so she could reward him if he complied or punish him if he declined. He may also not fear public disgrace because she had the power to protect him. But his fear of Allah melts away all these incentives. When he says that he fears Allah, he declares that no desire or threat is worth the anger of Allah. And for that, Allah makes him taste the sweetness of his protection on the Last Day. Allah will replace his fear and pain with complete contentment when He meets him.

Sincerity, love, charity, and dhikr

The interplay between sincerity and love, like the previous examples, creates the next categories of those blessed under the shade on the Day of Judgment.

The one who mentions Allah's name and cries when he is alone is doing so out of sincere love for Allah. His tears are not tainted by desire for praise and recognition or polluted by the presence of people he wants to impress. His tears mean that his heart is alive. He cries out of fearing Allah, loving Allah, over his past sins, and for missed opportunities where he could've pleased Allah. His seclusion spurs thought into what pleases Allah and not what displeases Him. Being alone for him is not a cause for alarm or depression but allows him to inspect his life without worldly clamor. He peels the superficial layers of his life and penetrates what matters. In this state where he is so close to his Creator and Sustainer, his heart beats to testify that there is no one that he can rely on except Allah. And the tears overflow to express these emotions.

Sincerity and love are evident with one who donates in secret. Although there are benefits to public charity—such as when it inspires others to be generous—there are definite advantages to hidden charity. It is much easier to be sincere when the action is private. Those who give in secret desire no worldly compensation but the love and approval of Allah. This person in the *hadith* is so keen on hiding his charity and preserving his sincerity that he hides his donations from everyone. Even the closest people to him don't know about it. His charity is so hidden that other parts of his body are unaware of it! Why does he go to such great lengths? Because he only wants Allah to see and reward it. He doesn't want to corrupt his deeds with human glances and statements. Such behavior should inspire us. We may do some or much good in public, but we should plan to hide some of it to keep it between Allah and us. These hidden deeds will be our emergency fund on the Day of Judgment: in case we were insincere with the rest of our deeds, at least the private ones may help us escape Hellfire.

The last category shows how love brings Allah's Love and Mercy. These two loved each other for Allah's sake. They loved Allah first, and their love for Allah moved them to love what Allah loves. When they met up, they did so because of this love; and when they left each other and parted ways, they did so with their love intact. This is so because their love was based on their love for Allah and less on personal feelings. Such love withstands the test of time and space. It even withstands the test and fluctuations of moods and hospitality. Since the basis of this love is Allah, it continues strong even when the other is not as generous or kind as he was before. Yes, our personal love may decline, but religious love changes only because of changes in righteousness. And as long as they both are righteous, their love will endure and maybe even increase. The only time it will decrease is when one of them starts disobeying Allah. This brotherhood/sisterhood is rare these days but is not impossible to achieve and find. All of us are looking to find this lasting love, and we can get it if we love Allah first.

Project

Let's increase our love for the houses of Allah. Try to spend more time in the masjid and take your family more frequently there. Take care of the masjid while you are in it more than you do your own house: keep it clean and respect it. Join the lectures and study circles held in it and stay connected to the masjid. Allow your heart to get attached to the house of Allah and the righteous in it.

Reserve some of your worship to times when no one sees you except Allah. Try to pray your voluntary prayers when no one is around, give charity without anyone knowing, and engage in *du'a* and *dhikr* when you are alone at night. You will soon feel the warmth of this sincere worship by the Will of Allah.

HADITH FORTY

الحديث الأربعون

Your heart needs regular worship

قالَ رسول اللهِ ﷺ: «مَنْ سَمِعَ النِّداءَ يَوْمَ الجمُعَةِ فَلَمْ يَأْتِها ثمَّ سَمِعَهُ فَلَم يَأْتِهِ ثُمَّ سَمِعَهُ فَلَم يَأْتِها طَبَعَ اللهُ على قَلبِهِ وجَعَلَ قَلْبَهُ قَلْبَ مُنافِقٍ»

رواه البيهقي في شعب الإيمان (٢٧٤٥) وحسنه الألباني (صحيح الترغيب ٧٣٥) وعبد القادر الأرناؤوط.

The Prophet ﷺ said: «The one who hears the call to prayer on Friday and doesn't come to it, then hears it and doesn't come to it, then hears it and doesn't come to it, Allah then will put a seal on his heart and make his heart the heart of a hypocrite.»

Reported by al-Bayhaqi in *Shuʿab al-Iman* (2745). Al-Albani (*Sahih al-Targhib*, 735) and Abdul Qadir al-Arnaʿut declared it *hasan*.

Commentary

The life of the heart can only be sustained by the regular worship of Allah. Consistent disobedience, on the other hand, slowly strips the heart of its virtues until it kills it. Disobedience builds a dark wall around the heart that shuts out the light of the truth.

Friday

Friday is the most important day of the week, and Friday prayer is pivotal on that day. As the weekly Eid, Friday presents us with great rewards and opportunities for forgiveness throughout the day. We bathe, dress up, and men put perfume on before heading to the prayer, much like we do on the two annual Eids. Allah wants our Friday experience to be unlike the rest of the days of the week, and we should take care to make it so.

Eid is tied to the worship of Allah. Eids in Islam follow great worship (Ramadan and Hajj) and include great worship in them (Eid prayers, Friday prayers, accepted supplication, forgiveness of sins). Eid in Islam is built on a unique theory and understanding of happiness. Festivals all possess a cause: why the day is special and why people are happy. The source of happiness in all the Islamic festivals is getting nearer to Allah. All other reasons that produce happiness on Eid (e.g. food, new clothes, gifts, taking a day off, and travel) are expressions and experiences that flow from the main cause; they are secondary to the main cause of celebration. Eid in Islam is not meaningless fun but a recognition of the gifts of Allah that fill the heart with joy. Having fun and *halal* entertainment springs from this joy. This is why every Eid (annual or weekly) has a prayer and *khutbah* in it. Our Eid combines the benefits of the Hereafter and this world, piety and fun.

Allah has blessed us with the Friday prayer and *khutbah*. It is the weekly session where we are asked to sit and learn as part of our worship of Allah. It is a weekly dose of reminders to stay on the path and not stray. And Allah made it compulsory to attend for men, so the community never stops learning and never stays too far from remembering Allah. The hearts dry up when they are not watered by Allah's reminders (see *Hadith Twenty-Nine*).

أَلَمۡ يَأۡنِ لِلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ أَن تَخۡشَعَ قُلُوبُهُمۡ لِذِكۡرِ ٱللَّهِ
وَمَا نَزَلَ مِنَ ٱلۡحَقِّ وَلَا يَكُونُواْ كَٱلَّذِينَ أُوتُواْ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ مِن قَبۡلُ
فَطَالَ عَلَيۡهِمُ ٱلۡأَمَدُ فَقَسَتۡ قُلُوبُهُمۡۖ وَكَثِيرٞ مِّنۡهُمۡ فَٰسِقُونَ ١٦

Hasn't the time come for the hearts of those who believe to be

> affected by Allah's Reminder and the revealed truth, and not be like those who received the Scripture before, where a long time had passed for them and so their hearts were hardened? And many of them were disobedient to Allah.
>
> Al-Hadid (Q57:16)

When we are distant from Allah's reminders, we lose our resistance to Shaytan and are sucked deeper into this world; we become the prisoners of our desires and its slaves. Friday prayer is this weekly lifesaver that keeps us from drowning in this world.

The importance of this prayer is clear from the *hadith* of this chapter. In another *hadith*:

«لينتهينَّ أقوامٌ عن وَدْعِهُم الجُمُعات أو ليختمنَّ الله على قلوبهم ثم ليكونُنَّ من الغافلين»

رواه مسلم (٨٦٥).

«Either some people will stop missing the Friday prayers or Allah will seal their hearts and they will be among the heedless.»

Reported by Muslim (865).

Were the Friday prayer not central to individual and communal health and *iman*, the punishment for its neglect wouldn't have been so serious. The life of the heart depends on the Friday prayer. The one who abandons this prayer does so out of disregard for what Allah deems important and significant. This attitude gradually kills their *iman*, religious practice, and commitment. The Prophet ﷺ said:

«من ترَكَ ثلاثَ جُمَعٍ تَهاونًا بِها طبعَ اللَّهُ علَى قلبِهِ»

رواه أبو داود (١٠٥٢) والنسائي (١٣٦٨) وصححه الألباني (صحيح أبي داود ١٠٥٢).

«Whoever misses three Fridays out of negligence, Allah will

> place a seal over his heart.»
>
> Reported by Abu Dawud (1052) and al-Nasa'i (1368). It was declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih Abu Dawud*, 1052).

The problem here is the disregard for what Allah loves and commands. When one doesn't care anymore, they will leave more and more of what Allah loves. When the neglect reaches the level of missing three consecutive Fridays, the reservoir of *iman* will have dried up. This is what causes the seal on the heart, hypocrisy, and heedlessness. Without the desire for *iman*, one will drift further away from Allah until they forsake all of Islam. This will help us understand what Ibn Abbas رَضِيَ ٱللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا said:

> قال ابن عباسٍ رضي الله عنه: (من ترك الجمعةَ ثلاثَ جمعٍ متوالياتٍ
> فقد نبذ الإسلامَ وراءَ ظهرِه)
> صححه الألباني (صحيح الترغيب ٧٣٣).
>
> Whoever misses Friday, three consecutive Fridays, has forsaken Islam behind their back.
>
> Declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Targhib*, 733).

Disobedience of Allah starts slow but builds up with time. And when it does, it moves to demolish the entire faith structure. Attending the Friday prayer, with observance of its *sunnahs* and etiquettes, keeps us close to Allah.

Seal on the heart

The heart-seal is a consequence of moving away from Allah. The seal is the *Ran* we discussed before (see *Hadith Twenty-Eight*). Individual sins collect, like patches making a quilt, to stand between the heart and guidance. With such a seal, the light of Islam cannot penetrate, or it does with great difficulty and diminished illumination. This heart cannot see the truth and isn't interested in it when it sees it. It runs away from Allah to embrace every tantalizing part of this world. It values the immediate and material and discounts spirituality and *iman*. It cannot escape its desires because they are the only thing that keeps it moving and gives it meaning. It cannot face life's difficult questions because it is unprepared for them. This heart is small and constricted, living off the joy of the transient until it is rudely awakened by tragedies and death.

It is not difficult to understand how rust builds up in the heart. When we abuse our hearts with disobedience and fail to clean them, they deteriorate. When we don't feed them—as we feed our bodies, fuel our cars, or charge our phones, they stop. When *iman* isn't nourishing and softening the hearts, they stagnate and collapse. When the hearts are empty of Allah and faith; lust, doubts, anger, and Shaytan take residence in it. All these are barriers that resist the truth. This is the cover that surrounds the heart and keeps growing bigger and thicker with time. Layers upon layers wrap themselves around the heart to prevent it from breathing the truth. And the heart gets so used to the darkness and polluted air that it starts hating purity and innocence when it sees it. It starts fighting them to extinguish Allah's light. How did the heart reach this stage? It all began with a sin that it didn't repent from.

The heart of a hypocrite

Hearts are of three types: the heart of the believer, the nonbeliever, and the heart of the hypocrite. As the previous *hadiths* and the following one assert, leaving Friday prayer is a cause for hypocrisy.

«مَن تَركَ ثَلاثَ جُمُعَاتٍ مِن غيرِ عُذْرٍ كُتِبَ مِن المنافِقينَ»

صححه الألباني (صحيح الترغيب ٧٢٩).

> «Whoever misses three Fridays without an excuse will be written among the hypocrites.»

Declared *sahih* by al-Albani (*Sahih al-Targhib*, 729).

The subsequent stage to a sealed heart is developing hypocrisy and falling into *ghaflah* (heedlessness). This heart, as Allah describes it, has been overtaken by Shaytan.

ٱسْتَحْوَذَ عَلَيْهِمُ ٱلشَّيْطَـٰنُ فَأَنسَىٰهُمْ ذِكْرَ ٱللَّهِ ۚ

Shaytan has overcome them and made them
forget the remembrance of Allah.
Al-Mujadilah (Q58:19)

When darkness overwhelms a heart, Shaytan climbs to its helm and assumes its leadership. Acquiring the heart of a hypocrite is to acquire their attributes, their doubts, confusion, behavior, and disease. As the hypocrites chose to ignore the truth after they had known it, so will the one who abandons the prayer. It is a conscience choice to ignore Allah's commands, a purposeful abandonment of guidance. This heart is slow to respond to what Allah loves, quick towards what He hates. It cares about what people think and say, not that Allah is watching. This heart is dark: it hates good for other people and desires their hardship. And it has some hatred in it for Islam and its rituals. Whenever a heart has hypocrisy, it will hate a part of Islam in proportion to its hypocrisy and related to it. We can even sense this at times in our hearts. When we are distant from what Allah loves and in the bosom of what He hates, our hearts resist the commands of Allah and experience discomfort when they are mentioned.

A heedless heart is unable to pursue what benefits it and avoid what harms it. The basic task of a heart is to do exactly that, but this heart is diseased and too weak to see the truth or desire it. A heedless heart actually loves what harms it and dislikes what benefits it. It is so confused that it seeks its own destruction and runs away from salvation.

The heart needs regular worship of Allah to stay healthy. Let's try to understand this better. Allah is the source of illumination in this world, and without Him there is complete darkness. Every time we listen to Allah and worship Him, we would be admitting more of this light into our hearts and lives. Without Him, we would stay in perpetual darkness. So, when we abandon our *Salah*, we deprive ourselves of His light. It would be like the hungry refusing to eat or the sick refusing to take their medicine. Staying away from Allah deprives the soul of its medicine and the heart of its life. And the longer it stays away, the more severe its condition gets. Coming back to Allah in worship and repentance restores life and health back to heart and soul just like hunger and sickness disappear after food and medicine. The obligatory worship of Allah is there to protect our *iman* from Shaytan. This is why negligence is so detrimental to our iman: it leaves us in the dark as easy prey for Shaytan.

A heart close to Allah honors Him and His commands. A heart that desires *tazkiyah* must realize that its goal cannot be achieved without the regular worship of Allah.

وَلَقَدۡ نَعۡلَمُ أَنَّكَ يَضِيقُ صَدۡرُكَ بِمَا يَقُولُونَ ﴿٩٧﴾ فَسَبِّحۡ بِحَمۡدِ
رَبِّكَ وَكُن مِّنَ ٱلسَّٰجِدِينَ ﴿٩٨﴾ وَٱعۡبُدۡ رَبَّكَ
حَتَّىٰ يَأۡتِيَكَ ٱلۡيَقِينُ ﴿٩٩﴾

And We know that your breast is constrained because of what they
say. So exalt and praise your Rabb and be of those who prostrate.
And worship your Rabb until there comes to you the certainty.
Al-Hijr (Q15:97–99)

Allah knows that the cure to the chest of His beloved ﷺ is proximity to Him, and so He commanded him to pray and worship Him. This is the cure for all the hearts and whatever is in them. And the medicine must continue until our last breath. This was the *tazkiyah* path of the Prophet ﷺ, and it has to be ours as well.

HADITH FORTY-ONE

الحديث الواحد والأربعون

Remember Allah often

قالَ رسول اللهِ ﷺ: «ادْعُوا اللَّهَ وأَنْتُم مُوقِنونَ بالإجابَةِ واعْلَموا أنَّ اللَّهَ لا يَسْتَجيبُ دُعاءً مِنْ قَلْبٍ غَافِلٍ لَاهٍ»

رواه الترمذي (٣٤٧٩) والحاكم (١٨١٧) وحسنه الألباني (صحيح الترمذي ٣٤٧٩).

The Prophet ﷺ said: «Call upon Allah while certain of being answered, and know that Allah does not answer a supplication from a heedless and distracted heart.»

Reported by al-Tirmidhi (660) and al-Hakim (1031). Al-Albani declared it *hasan* (*Sahih al-Tirmidhi*, 3479).

Commentary

The last *hadith* in this book reminds us that the state of *ghaflah* (heedlessness) is a barrier between us and Allah. Forgetting Allah kills our hearts. But when the heart is conscious of Allah in worship, Allah takes care of all its needs.

Du'a, life, and certainty

Du'a is our ever-present connection to Allah. It is how we draw close to Him, how we prevail against the struggles of our lives, and how we reorient our priorities to the certainty of the Hereafter. *Du'a* is the measure of *iman* and its generator: we do more of it when we are close to Allah, and it brings us closer to Allah when we do it.

Du'a, as the Prophet ﷺ explained, encapsulates the essence of our worship:

> «الدُّعاءُ هوَالعبادةُ» ثمَّ قال ﴿وَقَالَ رَبُّكُمُ ادْعُونِي أَسْتَجِبْ لَكُمْ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ عَنْ عِبَادَتِي سَيَدْخُلُونَ جَهَنَّمَ دَاخِرِينَ﴾ [غافر: ٦٠].
>
> رواه أبو داود (١٤٧٩) والترمذي (٣٢٤٧) وصححه النووي والألباني (صحيح الترمذي ٣٢٤٧).
>
> «*Du'a* is worship.» Then he recited: ﴾And your Rabb said: "Invoke me and I shall answer you. Indeed, those who scorn my worship shall enter Hell humiliated."﴿ [Ghafir: 60])
>
> Reported by Abu Dawud (1479) and al-Tirmidhi (3247). It was declared *sahih* by al-Nawawi and al-Albani (*Sahih al-Tirmidhi*, 3247).

What is worship? It is to submit to Allah in complete humility and love. It is to turn completely to Him in reliance and trust. Worship is the recognition of our utter dependence on Allah and the consequent devotion we give to Him because of it. Worship is asking Him alone because no one else can fulfill our needs but Him. Worship is to praise and glorify Allah because of His perfection and constant gifts. *Du'a* is all of that.

If *du'a* is worship, then we cannot live without it. We cannot afford to spend a single day without *du'a* because we are always in need of Allah, physically and spiritually. Every second of every day is a second that happens and lasts because of Allah. Our need for Allah is without end, and our worship must ascend to reflect this. *Du'a* is the best act of worship and its easiest: it is the harmonious movement of hearts and lips, a conversation that we can start anytime with Allah. And because it puts us in direct communion with Allah, this worship has an incredible effect on invigorating our hearts. If you want to increase your *iman* and feel better now (I mean right now), spend some moments in *du'a*. The longer you do it, the better you will feel (go ahead and try it for three minutes).

Duʿa, like all worship, has etiquettes in order to realize its goals. Details of these etiquettes can be found in the books of *hadith* and books on the virtue of *duʿa*. These etiquettes can be the difference between an accepted and a rejected *duʿa*. Two of these etiquettes, as the *hadith* of the chapter teaches, are the presence of the heart and certitude that Allah will answer. If the heart is not present during the supplication, the Prophet ﷺ tells us that the *duʿa* won't be accepted. And if doubts about Allah's Generosity and Wisdom settle in our hearts, they will also deprive us of the blessings of *duʿa*.

To have certainty in Allah's response can be understood in two complementary ways: to be in a state that allows our *duʿa* to be accepted, and to believe that Allah is listening and that He answers us when we call upon Him. To be in this state is to adhere to what Allah loves and to avoid what Allah hates. This isn't a demand for perfection, for Allah knows that we are all flawed and prone to sin. If Allah is only going to accept the supplication of the ultra-righteous, most of us won't qualify. But Allah is Most Generous and Merciful. What He wants is for us to strive to be close to Him and to repent from sins that keep us away from Him. When we are in this state, Allah is most likely to answer our requests.

In conjunction with this, we must also have certainty that Allah will answer our *duʿa*. One may ask, "How can we have certainty that our supplications will be answered when, as we know, not all *duʿa* will be granted?" The answer to this important—and sometimes troubling—question is to remember that the Allah answers our *duʿa* by granting us what we need, whether it's what we asked for or not. Our *duʿa* is indeed answered when instead of what we are seeking, Allah grants us a greater gift or protects us from a greater harm. The crux of *duʿa* is trusting Allah: trusting that He hears us, cares about us, has the power to help us, and to trust His Wisdom when he gives and denies. This is why one of the etiquettes of *du‘a* is not to lose patience and abandon *du‘a*. Hastiness reflects a basic misunderstanding of Allah's attributes and our relationship with Him. We lose our patience with *du‘a* when we are too focused on our worldly needs and not the Hereafter. We lose our patience when we forget that when we call on Allah, we entrust Him with our request, and He decides the when and how. If we keep this in mind, if we remember the wisdom of Allah and His love for us, we will persist in our *du‘a* and never lose confidence that Allah is close, listening, and will grant us what we truly need. It's just that sometimes what we want is not what we truly need.

The presence of the heart

The heart is the essential component of our *du‘a*. The need we feel inside it moves us closer to Allah, moves our tongue with praise and petitions. When the heart is part of our worship, it gives it meaning and impact. The reward of any worship multiplies when the heart is in it with devotion, sincerity, and love. The heart makes the difference between a reward multiplied ten times and one multiplied seven hundred times or more. When the heart is absent, however, worship becomes an empty shell, without life or impact. The Prophet ﷺ also tells us that the absence of the heart hinders the acceptance of *du‘a*. When the heart is missing, our words turn empty and lifeless. How can one be speaking to Allah and have their heart elsewhere? How can they expect their words and pleas to be taken seriously? It is the worship of the heart—its love for Allah, dependence on Him, and its poverty before Him—that makes the *du‘a* the great worship that it is. When you take all of this out of it, what's left are dead words without meaning.

Heedlessness and play of the heart

The *hadith* describes two states of the heart that undermine worship: *ghaflah* and *lahw*. *Ghaflah* is the deliberate neglect of something, intentionally forgetting about it. One may unintentionally forget something, which is not blameworthy. But *ghaflah* comes from turning away from something until you forget it. *Lahw* is the play and distraction of the heart when it is occupied with what doesn't bring it benefit. *Ghaflah* and *lahw* are connected, accompanying each other. It starts when the heart fails to think about what benefits it in this world and the next but is consumed by its lust for this world. Its distance from Allah hardens it. Its love for this world corrupts it. It ignores what Allah loves for what it loves, and breaks His commands without thought. As the heedlessness grows, the sweetness of its worship goes away. Now, it only finds its happiness in this world and what angers Allah. The Hereafter becomes the least of its worries. And with time, it may lose its faith entirely. With time, it begins to oppose Allah publicly and criticize His wisdom.

It is important not to let *ghaflah* take hold of our hearts and lives. The danger of *ghaflah* is that it sneaks up on us. We are busy, we are distracted, but before we know it we have spent days and weeks without nurturing our *iman*. We've let our *iman* slip. Our hearts have gotten a little harder, a little more cynical, a little more attached to sin, and a little more material. If we catch it early, we can treat it. This is why we have the daily prayers. But we also need to set for ourselves other checks that help stem our *ghaflah*. We should introduce daily readings of the Quran into our lives. As we read, we should ponder the lessons of what we hear and move to apply them. We should visit the mosques and attend the study circles held in them more frequently. We should seek the company of the pious for inspiration. We should aim to get a little closer to Allah every single day. Without such plans and executions, we will fall victims to forgetting Allah and developing a stone-hard heart. We should never let the gap between us and Allah grow. Never.

Humans are forgetful by nature. On top of this weakness, there is Shaytan, who distracts us with the glamor and glitter of this world so that we forget Allah sooner. We cannot win against him if we don't have a plan. *Tazkiyah* is a daily project: we need to nurture it daily as we nurture an infant or a young plant. Each day is another step on the ladder of *tazkiyah*, bringing us closer to our Creator. So we need sustained reminders, we need sustained worship, and we need to keep learning. Let's keep our eye on the ultimate prize and not lose sight of it. Let's not forget Allah. If we forget Him, we'll forget every good thing in our lives.

وَلَا تَكُونُوا۟ كَٱلَّذِينَ نَسُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ فَأَنسَىٰهُمْ أَنفُسَهُمْ ۚ

And don't be like those who forgot Allah, so He made them
forget about their themselves.
Al-Hashr (Q59:19)

نَسُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ فَنَسِيَهُمْ ۗ

They forgot about Allah, so He forgot them.
Al-Tawbah (Q9:67)

I conclude the book with this *hadith* to remind us that the path of *tazkiyah* is about getting closer to Allah. It is Allah who cures our hearts from disease, and it is He who elevates our souls to Him. The goal of *tazkiyah* is to be close to Allah, to love Him, to do what He loves, and to feel that He is the greatest joy in this life. We should be diligent in *du'a* that Allah grants us all of this, to transform us into spiritual Muslims who pursue the Hereafter. We can only reach Allah through the path and actions that He loves, so we need to be constant in our *du'a* that Allah guides us to His path and helps us stay on it. The roots of *tadsiyah* (the impurity of the soul) is the growing gap between Allah and us in pursuit of this world (money, fame, sex, and so on). I want to remind us all through this *hadith* that Allah is very close to all of us:

we can reach Him as soon as we move our lips.

I pray that you found great benefits in this book. I ask Allah to increase and preserve the *iman* of the reader and to help them understand their heart better. I ask Allah to help us love Him more than anything else. I ask Allah to grant us the highest degrees in Jannah. Ameen.